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# **GUZ 07 Judges**

*Bible Commentary:  
David Guzik TEV - VII*

**David Guzik**

**David Guziks' Commentary On**  
**07 Judges**  
**Biblical Text – TEV (Good News Bible)**

**The Continuing Conquest of Canaan**

**Jdg 1:1** After Joshua's death the people of Israel asked the LORD, "Which of our tribes should be the first to go and attack the Canaanites?"

Jdg 1:2 The LORD answered, "The tribe of Judah will go first. I am giving them control of the land."

Jdg 1:3 The people of Judah said to the people of Simeon, "Go with us into the territory assigned to us, and we will fight the Canaanites together. Then we will go with you into the territory assigned to you." So the tribes of Simeon

Jdg 1:4 and Judah went into battle together. The LORD gave them victory over the Canaanites and the Perizzites, and they defeated ten thousand men at Bezek.

Jdg 1:5 They found Adonibezek there and fought him.

Jdg 1:6 He ran away, but they chased him, caught him, and cut off his thumbs and big toes.

Jdg 1:7 Adonibezek said, "Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off have picked up scraps under my table. God has now done to me what I did to them." He was taken to Jerusalem, where he died.

Jdg 1:8 The people of Judah attacked Jerusalem and captured it. They killed its people and set fire to the city.

Jdg 1:9 After this they went on to fight the Canaanites who lived in the hill country, in the foothills, and in the dry country to the south.

Jdg 1:10 They marched against the Canaanites living in the city of Hebron, which used to be called Kiriath Arba. There they defeated the clans of Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmi.

Jdg 1:11 From there the men of Judah marched against the city of Debir, at that time called Kiriath Sepher.

Jdg 1:12 One of them, called Caleb, said, "I will give my daughter Achsah in marriage to the man who succeeds in capturing Kiriath Sepher."

Jdg 1:13 Othniel, the son of Caleb's younger brother Kenaz, captured the city, so Caleb gave him his daughter Achsah in marriage.

Jdg 1:14 On the wedding day Othniel urged her to ask her father for a field. She got down from her donkey, and Caleb asked her what she wanted.

Jdg 1:15 She answered, "I want some water holes. The land you have given me is in the dry country." So Caleb gave her the upper and lower springs.

Jdg 1:16 The descendants of Moses' father-in-law, the Kenite, went on with the people of Judah from Jericho, the city of palm trees, into the barren country south of Arad in Judah. There they settled among the Amalekites.

Jdg 1:17 The people of Judah went with the people of Simeon, and together they defeated the Canaanites who lived in the city of Zephath. They put a curse on the city, destroyed it, and named it Hormah.

Jdg 1:18 (18-19) The LORD helped the people of Judah, and they took possession of the hill country. But they did not capture Gaza, Ashkelon, or Ekron, with their surrounding territories. These people living along the coast had iron chariots, and so the people of Judah were not able to drive them out.

Jdg 1:20 As Moses had commanded, Hebron was given to Caleb, who drove out of the city the three clans descended from Anak.

Jdg 1:21 But the people of the tribe of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites living in Jerusalem, and the Jebusites

have continued to live there with the people of Benjamin ever since.

Jdg 1:22 (22-23) The tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh went to attack the city of Bethel, at that time called Luz. The LORD helped them. They sent spies to the city,

Jdg 1:24 who saw a man leaving and said to him, "Show us how to get into the city, and we won't hurt you."

Jdg 1:25 So he showed them, and the people of Ephraim and Manasseh killed everyone in the city, except this man and his family.

Jdg 1:26 He later went to the land of the Hittites, built a city there, and named it Luz, which is still its name.

### **Failure to Complete the Conquest**

Jdg 1:27 The tribe of Manasseh did not drive out the people living in the cities of Beth Shan, Taanach, Dor, Ibleam, Megiddo, and the nearby towns; the Canaanites continued to live there.

Jdg 1:28 When the Israelites became stronger, they forced the Canaanites to work for them, but still they did not drive them all out.

Jdg 1:29 The tribe of Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites living in the city of Gezer, and so the Canaanites continued to live there with them.

Jdg 1:30 The tribe of Zebulun did not drive out the people living in the cities of Kitron and Nahalal, and so the Canaanites continued to live there with them and were forced to work for them.

Jdg 1:31 The tribe of Asher did not drive out the people living in the cities of Acco, Sidon, Ahlab, Achzib, Helbah, Aphek, and Rehob.

Jdg 1:32 The people of Asher lived with the local Canaanites, since they had not been driven out.

Jdg 1:33 The tribe of Naphtali did not drive out the people living in the cities of Beth Shemesh and Bethanath. The people of Naphtali lived with the local Canaanites, but forced them to work for them.

Jdg 1:34 The Amorites forced the people of the tribe of Dan into the hill country and did not let them come down to the plain.

Jdg 1:35 The Amorites continued to live at Aijalon, Shaalbim, and Mount Heres, but the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh kept them under their rule and forced them to work for them.

Jdg 1:36 North of Sela, the Edomite border ran through Akrabbim Pass.

## **Judges 1:1-36**

### **Judges 1 - Victory and Defeat in the Promised Land**

#### **A. Continuing victory in Israel.**

*1. (1a) After the death of Joshua.*

#### **Now after the death of Joshua**

a. **Now after the death of Joshua:** In this period of the Judges, Israel lost the critical next link in its godly leadership. Moses was the great leader used by God to bring them out of Egypt; Joshua was Moses' assistant and the great leader used by God to bring them into the land of promise. But Joshua appointed no leader after him to guide the whole nation. They were in a critical place where they had to trust God more intensely than they ever had before.

i. God gives wonderful human leaders to His work on this earth, and it is always difficult for God's people when those human leaders pass from the scene. In such a situation, we may live in the past, wishing that leader were still with us.

**b. After the death of Joshua:** During this period of the judges (lasting some 340 years), there was no standing “office” of national leadership. Israel had no king, no president, and no prime minister on earth - only God in heaven. Yet at the necessary and appropriate times God brought forth a leader for the nation. For the most part these leaders would rise up, do his (or her) job, and then return to their obscurity. This required that the people of Israel maintain a real, abiding trust in God.

i. These national deliverers were not elected, and they didn’t come to leadership through royal succession. They were specially gifted by God for leadership in their times, and the people of God recognized and respected that gifting.

ii. When this book uses the term *judge*, it doesn’t mean someone who sits in a court and decides legal issues; the Hebrew word *shaphat* has more the idea of a *heroic leader*. “The Hebrew word *Shophetim* is derived from a word meaning to put right, and so to rule, and this is exactly what these men did.” (Morgan)

iii. The people of Israel had great obstacles. They were surrounded by people who lived in the most terrible immorality and idolatry, making a constant temptation to the same sins. The idolatrous lives of the Canaanites who lived around Israel were focused mainly on three things: money, sex, and having a relationship with God on *my* terms instead of *God’s* terms.

**c. After the death of Joshua:** The Book of Judges shows us a time that is sometimes confusing, difficult, and dark. For this reason, many neglect the Judges and regard this period of time as a “dark ages” of Israel’s history. Yet if we neglect this book we neglect a

wonderful account of the love and graciousness of God, and how He lovingly corrects His people.

i. What we find out about *man* in Judges is depressing; but what we find out about *God* in Judges is wonderful. "On the human side, it is a story of disobedience and disaster; and on the Divine side, of continued direction and deliverance." (Morgan)

ii. "There is, however, one light in which the whole book may be viewed, which renders it invaluable; it is a most remarkable history of the longsuffering of God towards the Israelites, in which we find the most signal instances of his *justice* and *mercy* alternately displayed; the people *sinned*, and were *punished*; they *repented*, and found *mercy*. Something of this kind we meet with in every page. And these things are written for our warning. None should *presume*, for God is JUST; none need *despair*, for God is MERCIFUL." (Clarke)

2. (1b-2) After Joshua's death, Israel seeks the LORD.

**It came to pass that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, "Who shall be first to go up for us against the Canaanites to fight against them?" And the LORD said, "Judah shall go up. Indeed I have delivered the land into his hand."**

a. **The children of Israel asked the LORD:** Here they did the *right* thing - the thing Joshua would have wanted them to do. With Joshua gone, they were not left without a leader; they were simply called to a renewed trust in God.

b. **And the LORD said:** When Israel sought the LORD, He guided them. This is a consistent pattern through the Book of Judges. God never failed to deliver and help His people when they sought Him.

i. Jesus expressed the same idea in Luk 11:9 : “*So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.*” When we ask of God and seek Him in sincerity we should expect that He will answer us. His response may come in an unexpected way, but we should expect that it will come.

c. **Judah shall go up:** God directed that the tribe of Judah - the tribe that the Messiah would come from - should lead the way in this fight. Judah was also the largest and strongest tribe. In this case, God’s plan made obvious military sense as well.

i. Under the leadership of Joshua Israel had broken the back of the Canaanite’s military strength; yet it remained for each individual tribe to actually go in and possess what God had given them.

*3. (3-7) Judah (with the tribe of Simeon) defeats Bezek and their king.*

**So Judah said to Simeon his brother, “Come up with me to my allotted territory, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I will likewise go with you to your allotted territory.” And Simeon went with him. Then Judah went up, and the LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand; and they killed ten thousand men at Bezek. And they found Adoni-Bezek in Bezek, and fought against him; and they defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites. Then Adoni-Bezek fled, and they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and big toes. And Adoni-Bezek said, “Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off used to gather *scraps* under my table; as I have done, so God has repaid me.” Then they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died.**



a. **Judah said to Simeon his brother, "Come up with me":** The leaders of the tribe of Judah acted wisely here. By partnering with another tribe, the work was much easier. Here, the tribes functioned in the same way that God wants the church to function - as a body, with each part of the body helping out other parts of the body.

i. "The tribes of Judah and Simeon were blood-brothers (Gen 29:33-35) and are uniformly depicted as acting in the closest relationship." (Cundall)

b. **The LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand:** Seeking the LORD, obeying His guidance, and working together as a body always produces great results. Their success was plain to see: **the LORD delivered** all their enemies into their hands.

c. **They killed ten thousand men at Bezek:** This place where the conquered was called **Bezek** and the leader of this city was **Adoni-Bezek**, which means "Lord of Lightning." This was an enemy with a fearful name, but Judah and Simeon defeated him none the less.

i. **And they found Adoni-Bezek in Bezek:** The word **found** in this verse expresses a hostile encounter. The armies of Judah and Simeon didn't just stumble over **Adoni-Bezek**.

ii. Their punishment of **Adoni-Bezek** may seem cruel, yet we see that it was simply justice in its truest sense. He had done this same thing to **seventy kings**; so now he had his own toes and fingers cut off.

iii. The punishment made Adoni-Bezek worthless as a warrior; he could trouble Israel no more as a military man. "It was a custom among those Romans who did not like a military life, to cut off their own thumbs, that they might not be called into the army.

Sometimes the parents cut off the thumbs of their children, that they might not be called into the army.” (Clarke).

iv. We also see Judah and Simeon acting in an unselfish manner. They fought a battle in territory that did not directly belong to them. The city of Bezek was far to the north of Judah’s tribal lands.

*4. (8-20) Judah’s victories in the southern part of the land given to Israel.*

**Now the children of Judah fought against Jerusalem and took it; they struck it with the edge of the sword and set the city on fire. And afterward the children of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites who dwelt in the mountains, in the South, and in the lowland. Then Judah went against the Canaanites who dwelt in Hebron. (Now the name of Hebron was formerly Kirjath Arba.) And they killed Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai. From there they went against the inhabitants of Debir. (The name of Debir was formerly Kirjath Sepher.) Then Caleb said, “Whoever attacks Kirjath Sepher and takes it, to him I will give my daughter Achsah as wife.” And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother, took it; so he gave him his daughter Achsah as wife. Now it happened, when she came *to him*, that she urged him to ask her father for a field. And she dismounted from *her* donkey, and Caleb said to her, “What do you wish?” So she said to him, “Give me a blessing; since you have given me land in the South, give me also springs of water.” And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs. Now the children of the Kenite, Moses’ father-in-law, went up from the City of Palms with the children of Judah into the Wilderness of Judah, which *lies* in the South *near* Arad; and they**

went and dwelt among the people. And Judah went with his brother Simeon, and they attacked the Canaanites who inhabited Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. So the name of the city was called Hormah. Also Judah took Gaza with its territory, Ashkelon with its territory, and Ekron with its territory. So the LORD was with Judah. And they drove out the mountaineers, but they could not drive out the inhabitants of the lowland, because they had chariots of iron. And they gave Hebron to Caleb, as Moses had said. Then he expelled from there the three sons of Anak.

a. **Judah fought against Jerusalem and took it:** Here it is recorded that the city of Jerusalem fell to Judah. It was occupied for a time (Adoni-Bezek was taken there and died there), but later fell back to the Jebusites (see Jdg 1:21). Under the leadership of King David Israel conquered the city again some 400 years later (2Sa 5:6-10).

i. "The city of Jerusalem is one of the oldest cities in the world, having been occupied almost continually for a period of 5,000 years." (Cundall)

b. **Then Judah went against the Canaanites who dwelt in Hebron:** Judah also conquered Hebron, and the city was given to faithful Caleb and his family (see Jos 15:13-19).

i. Hebron was the ancient city of Abraham and the city which discouraged the ten unfaithful spies from taking the promised land in Moses' day because of the Anakim which lived there (Num 13:22-23).

ii. Cundall notes that Jdg 1:9 describes the three major geographic divisions of Israel:

- **The mountains**, or more literally *the hill country*, “which describes the mountainous regions between Jerusalem and Hebron.”

- **The South**, also known as the *Negev*, which is “the semi-arid area between Hebron and Kadesh-barnea.”

- **The lowland**, sometimes called the *Shelphelah* from the Hebrew word used here. This “is the region of foot-hills running north and south between the coastal plain and the central mountain range.”

c. **Give me a blessing:** Charles Spurgeon preached a wonderful sermon on Jdg 1:12-15 titled, *Aschsah's Asking, A Pattern of Prayer*. Spurgeon showed how the request from a daughter (Aschsah) to a father (Caleb) gives us a “parable of prayer.”

i. Aschsah was a good example because *she thought about what she wanted before she went to her father*. Before you pray, know what you need before God. She came to God with a very definite request that had been considered beforehand. “Think what you are going to ask before you begin to pray, and then pray like business men. This woman does not say to her father, ‘Father, listen to me,’ and then utter some pretty little oration about nothing; but she knows what she is going to ask for, and why she is going to ask it.” (Spurgeon)

ii. Aschsah was a good example because *she asked for help with her request*, asking her husband - **she urged him to ask her father for a field**. “A friend, some time ago, said to me, ‘My dear pastor, whenever I cannot pray for myself, and there are times when I feel shut up about myself, I always take to praying for you: ‘God bless him, at any rate!’ and I have not long been praying for you before I begin to feel able to pray for myself.’ I should like to come in for many of

those odd bits of prayer. Whenever any of you get stuck in the mud, do pray for me. It will do you good, and I shall get a blessing." (Spurgeon)

iii. Aschsah was a good example because *she knew it was her father she asked*.

iv. Aschsah was a good example because *she went humbly, yet eagerly*.

v. Aschsah's prayer was a good example because *her father asked her what she wanted*. God will ask us the same thing and we should know what we want.

vi. Aschsah's prayer was a good example because *she shows that we should actually ask for what we want before God*. It is a pleasure for God to hear you ask.

vii. Aschsah's prayer was a good example because *of what she simply prayed*. Her prayer was, "**give me a blessing.**"

viii. Aschsah's prayer was a good example because *she mingled gratitude with her petition* (**you have given me land in the South**).

ix. Aschsah's prayer was a good example because *she used past blessing as a reason to ask for more*.

x. Aschsah's prayer was a good example because *she realized that what she had been given before was of no use without continual springs of water*. "What is the use of the hearers if there be not the power of the Holy Spirit going with the Word to bless them? Give me springs of water." (Spurgeon)

xi. Aschsah's prayer was a good example because *her father gave her what she asked*.

xii. Aschsah's prayer was a good example because *her father gave to her in large measure*.

xiii. Aschsah's prayer was a good example because *her father was not critical of the request in the slightest way.*

d. **The city of Palms:** This was another name for the city of Jericho. The Kenites went from there to **Arad**, a city out in the Judean wilderness, west of Masada and the Dead Sea. **Zephath** isn't too far from there; **Gaza** and **Ashkelon** were out towards the coast and later became Philistine strongholds.

i. Cundall believes that **the city of Palms** was another city further south: "*The city of palm trees elsewhere indicates Jericho (Jdg 3:13), but that identification is ruled out here by the context. Possibly it was located at the southern end of the Dead Sea.*"

e. **They had chariots of iron:** As impressive as Judah's victory was it was nevertheless incomplete. They could not defeat nations that had the latest military technology: **chariots of iron.**

i. "Strange! Were the *iron chariots* too strong for Omnipotence?" (Clarke)

ii. This spoke more to Judah's lack of full trust in God than it did to Canaanite military superiority. Chariots were no problem for God's people when they were trusting God (see Exo 14:7-29, Jos 11:1-8, and 1Ki 20:21). Their attitude should have been like that reflected in Psa 20:7 : *Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the LORD our God.*

iii. "If they had believed in God, and gone forth in his name, the horses would soon have fled, as indeed they did when God gave his people faith. When Barak led the way with Deborah, then they smote Jabin, who had nine hundred chariots of iron... the

imperfection of their faith lay in this, as it may do in yours, my brethren, — that they believed one promise of God and did not believe another. There is a kind of faith which is strong in one direction, but utter weakness if tried in other ways.” (Spurgeon)

iv. “An unconverted person is here who has been thinking of coming to Christ, but he says: ‘I cannot give up all my sins. One of them I must retain: all the rest I can leave, but that one is invincible, for it has chariots of iron. I cannot drive it out,’ That sin must die, or you will perish by it. Depend upon it, that sin which you would save from slaughter will slaughter you.” (Spurgeon)

f. **Then he expelled from there the three sons of Anak:** Caleb’s victory over the **sons of Anak** shows what a trusting Israel could accomplish. The **sons of Anak** were large men and fierce warriors (Num 13:33, Deu 9:2), yet with God’s help Caleb defeated them (as is also recorded in Jos 15:13-14).

i. “Yet, as if to rebuke them, they had a singular incident set before them for the vindication of God’s power, and of that we read in the twentieth verse. Caleb, that grand old man, who still lived on, the sole survivor of all who came out of Egypt, had obtained Hebron as his portion, and he went up in his old age, when his bones were sore and set, and slew the three sons of Anak, even three mighty giants, and took possession of their city. In this way the Lord’s power was trusted and vindicated from the slur which Judah had brought upon it.” (Spurgeon)

ii. “I will not speak of Caleb, for you will tell me, ‘Ah, he was an old, old man, and belonged to another generation. He was just going off the scene; we do not wonder that he did great things.’ Ay, but he had a

nephew, one Othniel, a young man...The young hero stood forward, and went up to the fortress, and took the city, and passed it over to his uncle's hands, and received the promised reward. Oh yes, and we have seen raised up-and shall see it more and more young heroes who have been self-denying, self-distrustful, inconsiderate of themselves, who have been willing for Christ's sake to be anything or nothing, and God has been with them, and the power of the Most High has rested upon them." (Spurgeon)

## **B. Incomplete victory and defeat.**

*1. (21) The tribe of Benjamin does not take possession of Jerusalem.*

**But the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who inhabited Jerusalem; so the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.**

a. **The children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites:** This was a case where the battle had already been won (Jdg 1:8); the tribe of Benjamin simply had to enter into what was already theirs. It would certainly take effort, but the critical battle was over. Jerusalem belonged to them.

b. **So the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day:** Up until the time of the writer of the Book of Judges, the tribe of Benjamin failed to cast out the Jebusites and therefore lived in constant military and spiritual danger.

*2. (22-26) The house of Joseph conquers the city of Bethel.*

**And the house of Joseph also went up against Bethel, and the LORD was with them. So the house of Joseph sent men to spy out Bethel. (The name of the city was formerly Luz.) And when the spies saw a man coming**



out of the city, they said to him, "Please show us the entrance to the city, and we will show you mercy." So he showed them the entrance to the city, and they struck the city with the edge of the sword; but they let the man and all his family go. And the man went to the land of the Hittites, built a city, and called its name Luz, which *is* its name to this day.

a. **The house of Joseph:** This is an interesting (and somewhat rare) combining of the two tribes that came from Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh) into one group, **the house of Joseph**.

b. **And the LORD was with them:** We might credit the victory to their effective use of military espionage; but the real reason was because **the LORD was with them**.

c. **But they let the man and all his family go:** They seemed to use the events surrounding Rahab and the conquering of Jericho as a pattern (Joshua 3, 6), and a successful pattern at that.

3. (27-29) *Manasseh and Ephraim fail to drive out all the Canaanites.*

**However, Manasseh did not drive out *the inhabitants of Beth Shean and its villages, or Taanach and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Ibleam and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages; for the Canaanites were determined to dwell in that land. And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites under tribute, but did not completely drive them out. Nor did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites who dwelt in Gezer; so the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them.***

a. **The Canaanites were determined to dwell in the land:** At first there were pockets of Canaanites that these tribes were unable to push out of the land. But when the tribes eventually grew strong enough, they compromised with those Canaanites and thought they could use them to their advantage (

**they put the Canaanites under tribute).**

i. "The story as here given reveals that whereas the work began in earnest, it gradually weakened. The Lord was with Judah and victories resulted. The Lord was with Joseph and Beth-el was taken. Manasseh and Ephraim and all the rest weakened in the work and Canaanites were left in possession." (Morgan)

b. **Did not completely drive them out:** In the same way, when someone first begins their Christian life, they may not be strong enough in the **LORD** to deal with all the things they see that need changing; yet as they grow in the **LORD**, they must not slack in dealing with those areas. We never are to make a peace treaty with our sins; instead, be determined to **drive them out**.

i. "The one point that Israel should have borne in mind was that they had no right there. The land was not theirs, it had become Israel's. And moreover, God was prepared to drive them out; so that his people would have no fighting to do, but only to chase a flying foe." (Meyer)

ii. **Gezer** didn't belong to Israel until it was given to Solomon by Pharaoh (1Ki 9:16).

4. (30) *The tribe of Zebulun compromises and accommodates the Canaanites, putting them under tribute.*

**Nor did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitron or the inhabitants of Nahalol; so the Canaanites dwelt among them, and were put under tribute.**

a. **Nor did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants:** Each tribe had its own responsibility and its own battles to fight. In their particular battle, the tribe of **Zebulun** failed to take all that God had portioned for them.

b. **So the Canaanites dwelt among them, and were put under tribute:** The people of Zebulun thought they could make their incomplete obedience work to their advantage, especially economically. They failed to appreciate that the **Canaanites** who **dwelt among them** would eventually bring them into both social and spiritual crisis.

i. Because the crisis was not immediate, it was easy to think that it was not real. Yet it was certain, and only a trusting obedience to God could spare them the later cycle of crisis that marks the Book of Judges.

5. (31-32) *The tribe of Asher fails in taking full possession of their land.*

**Nor did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Acco or the inhabitants of Sidon, or of Ahlab, Achzib, Helbah, Aphik, or Rehob. So the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; for they did not drive them out.**

a. **Nor did Asher drive out:** The tribe of Asher also failed to take what God had apportioned for them. Each tribe who failed made it easier for the other tribes to also fail.

b. **So the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites:** Of the people of Zebulun we read that *the Canaanites dwelt among them* (Jdg 1:30). Yet in Asher it was even worse; it was the **Asherites** who **dwelt among the Canaanites**. They suffered a worse degree of social and spiritual declension.

i. "Whilst most of the tribes were able to occupy at least some part of their allotted territory, the tribe of Asher seems to have failed completely to dislodge the Canaanites." (Cundall)

6. (33) *The tribe of Naphtali compromises and accommodates the Canaanites, putting them under tribute.*

**Nor did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh or the inhabitants of Beth Anath; but they dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land. Nevertheless the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh and Beth Anath were put under tribute to them.**

a. **Nor did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants:** The tribe of Naphtali found it difficult to counter the trend of the other tribes. The defeat of one affects the condition of others.

i. God never intended for Israel to conquer the land of Canaan *easily*; He never intended it to happen quickly. Exo 23:29-30 and Deu 7:22-24 both say that God intended to give them the land *little by little*. Though God planned for Israel to take the land through constant trust in Him and frequent battles, they failed to do this and therefore did not **drive out the inhabitants**. It was almost as if Israel said, "If we can't have it *easy*, then we don't want it at all."

b. **They dwelt among the Canaanites... Nevertheless the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh and Beth Anath were put under tribute to them:** The people of Naphtali combined both facets of capitulation to the enemy. In some regions of their territory they lived under the shadow of the dominating Canaanites; in other regions they put the Canaanites **under tribute** to them. Both facets fell well short of God's command and intent for the people of Israel.

7. (34-36) *The tribe of Dan fails in taking full possession of their land.*

**And the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountains, for they would not allow them to come down to the valley; and the Amorites were determined to dwell in Mount Heres, in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim; yet when the strength of the house of Joseph became greater, they were put under tribute. Now the boundary of the Amorites was from the Ascent of Akrabbim, from Sela, and upward.**

a. **The Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountains:** Here, we see the people of God being pushed around by their enemies. This should never be the case when God's people are walking in the strength of their God.

b. **When the strength of the house of Joseph became greater, they were put under tribute:** Again, instead of doing what God said should be done with these enemies (to completely drive them out), they decided to use them as *they* thought best; to put these enemies under tribute.

i. "This they did out of covetousness, that root of all evil, neglecting the command of God to the contrary."  
(Trapp)

c. **The boundary of the Amorites:** The end result was that the **Amorites** had an appointed boundary within the inheritance of God's people. This was an unnecessary and dangerous accommodation to the social and spiritual enemies of the people of God.

i. There is a dangerous and seductive form of pacifism in the Christian life, which ignores the reality of the spiritual battle so clearly described in Eph 6:10-20 and referred to by analogy in the Book of Judges. This

pacifist attitude will happily make a peace with the devil that basically says, "I will not harm your interests if you leave me mostly alone." This attitude of spiritual surrender is unacceptable for the Christian.

ii. Leon Trotsky, the infamous Communist leader said at least one correct thing: "You may not be interested in war, but war is interested in you." To take an attitude of spiritual surrender is to willingly *lose* that war.

iii. At this period of time, the tribes of Israel at their best experienced incomplete victory; at their worst they simply surrendered to and accommodated the enemy. This makes us value the complete and glorious victory of Jesus Christ on our behalf all the more. There was *nothing* left incomplete in the victory He won for us on the cross and through the resurrection.

## **Israel's Disobedience**

**Jdg 2:1** The angel of the LORD went from Gilgal to Bochim and said to the Israelites, "I took you out of Egypt and brought you to the land that I promised to your ancestors. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you.

Jdg 2:2 You must not make any covenant with the people who live in this land. You must tear down their altars.' But you have not done what I told you. You have done just the opposite!

Jdg 2:3 So I tell you now that I will not drive these people out as you advance. They will be your enemies, and you will be trapped by the worship of their gods."

Jdg 2:4 When the angel had said this, all the people of Israel began to cry,

Jdg 2:5 and that is why the place is called Bochim. There they offered sacrifices to the LORD.

### **The Death of Joshua**

Jdg 2:6 Joshua sent the people of Israel on their way, and each man went to take possession of his own share of the land.

Jdg 2:7 As long as Joshua lived, the people of Israel served the LORD, and even after his death they continued to do so as long as the leaders were alive who had seen for themselves all the great things that the LORD had done for Israel.

Jdg 2:8 The LORD's servant Joshua son of Nun died at the age of a hundred and ten.

Jdg 2:9 He was buried in his own part of the land at Timnath Serah in the hill country of Ephraim north of Mount Gaash.

Jdg 2:10 That whole generation also died, and the next generation forgot the LORD and what he had done for Israel.

### **Israel's Unfaithfulness**

Jdg 2:11 Then the people of Israel sinned against the LORD and began to serve the Baals.

Jdg 2:12 They stopped worshiping the LORD, the God of their ancestors, the God who had brought them out of Egypt, and they began to worship other gods, the gods of the peoples around them. They bowed down to them and made the LORD angry.

Jdg 2:13 They stopped worshiping the LORD and served the Baals and the Astartes.

Jdg 2:14 And so the LORD became furious with Israel and let raiders attack and rob them. He let the enemies all around overpower them, and the Israelites could no longer protect themselves.

Jdg 2:15 Every time they would go into battle, the LORD was against them, just as he had said he would be. They were in great distress.

### **The Lord Raises Up Judges**

Jdg 2:16 Then the LORD gave the Israelites leaders who saved them from the raiders.

Jdg 2:17 But the Israelites paid no attention to their leaders. Israel was unfaithful to the LORD and worshiped other gods. Their fathers had obeyed the LORD's commands, but this new generation soon stopped doing so.

Jdg 2:18 Whenever the LORD gave Israel a leader, the LORD would help that leader and would save the people from their enemies as long as that leader lived. The LORD would have mercy on them because they groaned under their suffering and oppression.

Jdg 2:19 But when the leader died, the people would return to the old ways and behave worse than the previous generation. They would serve and worship other gods, and stubbornly continue their own evil ways.

Jdg 2:20 Then the LORD would become furious with Israel and say, "This nation has broken the covenant that I commanded their ancestors to keep. Because they have not obeyed me,

Jdg 2:21 I will no longer drive out any of the nations that were still in the land when Joshua died.

Jdg 2:22 I will use them to find out whether or not these Israelites will follow my ways, as their ancestors did."

Jdg 2:23 So the LORD allowed these nations to remain in the land; he did not give Joshua victory over them, nor did he drive them out soon after Joshua's death.

## **Judges 2:1-23**

### **Judges 2 – Israel's Failure, God's Mercy**



## **A. From Gilgal to Bochim.**

*1. (1-3) The Angel of the LORD preaches to Israel.*

**Then the Angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said: "I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers; and I said, 'I will never break My covenant with you. And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this? Therefore I also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be *thorns* in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you.'"**

a. **The Angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal:** It is likely that this was God Himself, appearing in a human form. There are frequent Old Testament appearances of **the Angel of the LORD** that indicate that it is God Himself.

i. There is a legitimate question as to if every mention of **the Angel of the LORD** is a divine appearance. As G. Campbell Morgan wrote, "This messenger, referred to as 'the angel of the Lord,' may have been a prophet, for the word rendered 'angel' may with equal accuracy be rendered messenger. On the other hand, it may have been a special divine and angelic personality."

ii. Assuming this to be a divine appearance (as the author believes it does indicate), we surmise that this was Jesus Christ appearing to the people of Israel before His incarnated appearance in Bethlehem. We know this is Jesus for two reasons.

- First because the **Angel of the LORD** here claimed divinity by saying that He was the one who led Israel up from Egypt, who made a covenant with Israel

(Jdg 2:1), and who personally called Israel to obedience (Jdg 2:2).

- Second because this person, appearing in human form before Israel, cannot be God the Father, because the Father is described as *invisible* (1Ti 1:17) and *whom no man has seen or can see* (1Ti 6:16).

iii. The idea of Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity, appearing as a man before Bethlehem is provocative, but logical. We know that He *existed* before Bethlehem (Mic 5:2); why should He *not*, on isolated but important occasions, appear in bodily form? We see other places where this happened, such as Gen 18:16-33, Gen 32:24-30, and Jdg 13:1-23.

iv. "Not in such a body as God had prepared for him when he took upon himself the form of a servant, but in such a form and fashion as seemed most congruous to his divine majesty, and to the circumstances of those he visited, this angel of the divine covenant whom we delight in came and spoke unto this people." (Spurgeon)

**b. I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land:** The first thing Jesus (as **the Angel of the LORD**) did was to remind Israel of His great love and faithfulness to them. He delivered them from Egypt's bondage; He gave them an abundant land of promise; He gave them a covenant that He would never break.

i. It is God's general pattern to remind us of His great love and faithfulness to us *before* calling us to obedience or confronting our sin. We love Him because He first loved us (1Jn 4:19), and we can only really obey Him as we walk in His love and abide in His covenant with us.

ii. The words, “**I will never break My covenant with you**” remind us that even though Israel never fully lived up to their part of the covenant, God promised that He would never forsake His part of the covenant.

c. **You have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this?** The **Angel of the LORD** confronted Israel in love. The question was stinging in its simplicity; there is never a *good reason* for our disobedience.

i. Israel’s real problem was not one of military power or technology; it was a spiritual problem. “The deplorable spiritual condition of the Israelites, not their lack of chariots, lay behind their failure to dispossess the Canaanites.” (Wolf)

d. **I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be thorns in your side:** The **Angel of the LORD** announced that He would allow the work of possessing the land to go unfinished as a way of correcting a disobedient Israel.

i. **I will not drive them out before you** reminds us that God would not do the work of conquering Canaan all by Himself. In the early years of the campaign in Canaan God did fight for Israel in a supernatural way. Yet He never intended it to be that way for the entire campaign of conquering the Canaanites.

ii. We often wish that God would do the work of Christian maturity for us; that we would wake up one morning and a certain besetting sin will just be gone. Sometimes God grants such a miraculous deliverance, and we praise Him for it. But more commonly He requires our partnership with Him in the process of Christian growth. Our partnership is important to God

because it shows that our heart is where His heart is; that we are truly growing close to God.

**e. They shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you:** The announcement that the Canaanites would remain as problems to the nation was promised beforehand to Israel if they would not faithfully drive out the Canaanites.

*i. But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be that those whom you let remain shall be irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you in the land where you dwell. (Num 33:55)*

*2. (4-6) The people respond with weeping and sorrow.*

**So it was, when the Angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voices and wept. Then they called the name of that place Bochim; and they sacrificed there to the LORD. And when Joshua had dismissed the people, the children of Israel went each to his own inheritance to possess the land.**

**a. The people lifted up their voices and wept:** This emotional response of the people was very hopeful. With all the weeping and wailing, there was reason to believe that God's word had a deep impact upon them, and that they were on their way to a genuine revival of God's work among them.

*i. Sadly, it was not the case. The subsequent record of the Book of Judges shows that this initial reaction of sorrow and repentance did not mature into a real, lasting repentance. Real repentance shows itself in action, not necessarily in weeping. We can be sorry about the consequences of our sin without being sorry about the sin itself.*

ii. One can weep and outwardly show repentance without ever inwardly repenting. This is why the Lord challenged Israel in Joe 2:13 : *So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness.*

iii. It is good to see people truly weeping over their sin and it should never be discouraged. However, "The tear is the natural drop of moisture, and soon evaporates; the better thing is the inward torrent of grief within the soul, which leaves the indelible mark within...One grain of faith is better than a gallon of tears. A drop of genuine repentance is more precious than a torrent of weeping." (Spurgeon)

b. **They sacrificed there to the LORD:** In this, they did the right thing. Any awareness of sin should drive us to God's appointed sacrifice. In their day that meant sin offerings of bulls and rams; in our day it means remembering God's sacrifice for us on the cross of Jesus Christ.

i. They did this "In testimony of their faith in Christ's merits (for they mourned not desperately) and their thankfulness that God had sent them a preacher, and not an executioner, considering their deserts." (Trapp)

c. **And when Joshua had dismissed the people:** This shows that Judges 2 begins as retrospect, looking back to the days even before the death of Joshua (which was described in Jdg 1:1). This hopeful response to the **Angel of the LORD** started when Joshua was still alive.

3. (7-10) *The new generation in Israel.*

**So the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD which**

**He had done for Israel. Now Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died *when he was* one hundred and ten years old. And they buried him within the border of his inheritance at Timnath Heres, in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mount Gaash. When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel.**

a. **So the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua:** Joshua's legacy was seen in the godliness of Israel during his leadership. He was truly one of history's great men of God.

b. **The servant of the LORD:** This is a deeply meaningful title for Joshua. It is applied only to great men of God like Moses (Deu 34:5), and David (Psa 18:1, title), and the courageous prophets (2Ki 9:7).

c. **And all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua:** Israel was also faithful to God in the days of Joshua's immediate successors. But afterward, there arose a generation who had *not seen all the great works of the LORD which He had done for Israel*.

d. **Another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel:** The new generation had no personal relationship with God, and no personal awareness of His power. God was someone who their parents related to and who did great things for their parent's generation.

**B. A summary of Israel's history during the time of the Judges.**

*1. (11-13) Israel falls into idolatry.*

**Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals; and they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from *among* the gods of the people who *were* all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the LORD to anger. They forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.**

**a. The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD:** Even in the days of Joshua Israel did not fully possess what they could have in the Promised Land. Yet in that time they remained faithful to God and they did not worship the idols of the Canaanites. After the death of Joshua, they fell into the worship of these grotesque idols.

i. It is strange that anyone would want to trade a personal, real, living God for a false god that is the figment of man's imagination. Yet there is something within man that is afraid of the exact God we need; we would rather serve a god of our own creation than the real, living God whom we can't control. The gods we create are the gods wanted by our sinful desires.

**b. And served the Baals:** The Canaanite idol Baal was an attractive rival to Yahweh because he was thought to be the god over the weather and nature for the Canaanites; he was essentially the god of agricultural success. In an agricultural society people served Baal because they wanted good weather for abundant crops and flocks. One might say that the bottom line with Baal was the bottom line; he was effectively the god of personal wealth.

i. "There were also 'Baals' associated with particular places, like the Baal of Peor (Num 25:3) or Baal-

Berith (Jdg 9:4); and this may account for the plural form." (Wolf)

ii. According to Wolf, the word *Baal* also meant "husband" or "owner." Therefore, when Israel worshipped the Canaanite god Baal, they entertained another "husband" or "owner."

c. **They forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtoreths:** The Canaanite idol Ashtoreth was an attractive rival to Yahweh because she was thought to be the goddess of love, sex, and fertility. She was usually honored with the practice of ritual sex with a priestess-prostitute. One might say that the bottom line with Ashtoreth was sex and love.

i. "The religion of these fertility gods was accompanied by all kinds of lascivious practices, especially in Canaan, where it was found in a degraded form which even incorporated child sacrifice." (Cundall)

d. **They forsook the LORD:** God made it clear that Israel's pursuit of these gods was nothing less than forsaking **the LORD God of their fathers**. Yet in all likelihood Israel did not see their idolatry as *forsaking* God; they probably just thought they were adding a few gods alongside of the **God of their fathers**. Nevertheless, the God of Israel is a jealous God who demands exclusive worship.

i. One Biblical illustration of our relationship with God is to describe it as a marriage relationship between husband and wife. It would be wrong for a wife (or a husband) to add many lovers to her marriage, claiming that she simply could love them all. A husband or wife has a righteous claim on the exclusive affection of their spouse; God has a righteous claim on our exclusive worship.



e. **In the sight of the LORD:** This implies that the sin was even more offensive to God because it was done right before His eyes. To give an extreme example, it is bad enough for a married person to commit adultery; but to commit adultery before the very eyes of one's spouse would be especially offensive.

f. **They followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them:** This shows another root cause for Israel's tragic idolatry. The influence of the Canaanites that they allowed to remain in their midst led them to idolatry. The result of not fully driving out the Canaanites was far worse than Israel imagined.

i. "We worship other gods – the gods of the nations around the idols of the market-place, the studio, the camp, and the bar." (Meyer)

2. (14-15) *God's wrath upon their sin of idolatry.*

**And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel. So He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. Wherever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for calamity, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn to them. And they were greatly distressed.**

a. **And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel:** This response of God to the unfaithfulness of Israel was no surprise. He specifically promised that He would do this in the covenant He made with Israel, which was characterized by blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience (as in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28).

i. We serve God under the terms of a different covenant, a better covenant (Heb 8:6). When we forsake God and do not abide in Jesus Christ, things may (and often do) go badly for us, but not because God has actively set His hand against us as He did to Israel under the Old Covenant. When we do not abide in Jesus and things go badly for us, it is simply because our actions have consequences and we reap the bitter fruit of not keeping ourselves in the love of God (Jud 1:21).

b. **So He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them:** The purpose of all this was so that when Israel was **greatly distressed**, they would turn their hearts back to **LORD**. God's goal wasn't punishment in itself, but repentance.

i. Therefore, we should see this as a manifestation of God's *love* for Israel instead of His *hate*. The worst judgment God can bring upon a person is to leave them alone, to stop trying to bring them to repentance.

ii. We see the same principle in the relationship between parents and children. Though children often wish their parents would just leave them alone, it is really their worst fear that no one would love them enough to correct them. The mid 1990s told the story of a woman named Shannon Wilsey who was a well-known actress in pornographic films. As a 23-year-old woman she made a lot of movies and a lot of money; yet she put a gun to her head and killed her self. Though a success by some standards, the detective investigating her death said, "I think her whole life caused this suicide." Shannon bragged about doing crazy things, yet she told a close friend that she wished her mother would have stopped her. The

friend said, "She felt bad because her mother didn't say anything about her being in the [pornography] business." After her suicide, an unmailed letter was found where she described about what she wished her dad would have done. "Where were you when I was dating rock star Gregg Allman when he was twenty-five years older than me? Where were you when I was on heroin? Where were you when I started doing porno movies?" The dad said he would have been there *had she only asked*.

3. (16-19) *The cyclical pattern of bondage and deliverance in the days of the Judges.*

**Nevertheless, the LORD raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them. Yet they would not listen to their judges, but they played the harlot with other gods, and bowed down to them. They turned quickly from the way in which their fathers walked, in obeying the commandments of the LORD; they did not do so. And when the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed them and harassed them. And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods, to serve them and bow down to them. They did not cease from their own doings nor from their stubborn way.**

a. **Nevertheless, the LORD raised up judges who delivered them:** Because of His great love for His people, God **raised up judges** – heroic leaders – to rescue Israel from their calamity. God did this **nevertheless**; not because Israel ever deserved such a

deliverer from God, but in spite of the fact that they were undeserving.

i. "It was a method made necessary by the repeated failure of the people. That should be clearly understood." (Morgan)

b. **Yet they would not listen to their judges, but played the harlot with other gods:** Though God gave Israel these heroic leaders, they did not **listen to their judges** in matters of spiritual leadership. They wanted the judges as *political* and *military* leaders, but not as spiritual leaders.

i. Trapp explains the idea behind the phrase, **played the harlot**: "Carried on by a spirit of fornication, a strong inclination, a vehement *impetus* to whoredom; so that they care not how they waste all upon it, and will not be reclaimed: so idolaters."

c. **The LORD was with the judge:** This explains the source of power with the judges God raised up. They were able to lead Israel in dramatic acts of deliverance because **the LORD was with the judge**, not because the judge was necessarily great or powerful in themselves.

d. **The LORD was moved to pity by their groaning:** During the time of the Judges, Israel only cried out to God and really depended on Him in times of emergency. When they did cry out to Him with **groaning**, He answered with **pity** and faithfulness.

i. "This connection of sin, punishment, and deliverance really forms the keynote to the historical movement recorded in the whole of the Book." (Morgan)

ii. This principle explains why some people are in a constant state of crisis; God knows that is the only

way they can be kept trusting in Him. Instead, God's desire is that we be in a constant relationship of dependence on Him. This is exactly how Jesus lived, as He said in Joh 5:19 : *Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.*

e. **When the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers:** The pattern of bondage, deliverance and blessing; followed by sin and bondage again is a discouraging fact in many Christian lives today.

i. This discouraging cycle was more understandable in ancient Israel than in the life of the modern Christian. This is because the Christian, as part of the New Covenant, lives with the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit and is made a new creature in Jesus. These are privileges that Israel in the days of the Judges knew *nothing* of.

ii. "The days of the judges were those in which there was no king over Israel. The fitfulness of our experience is often attributable to our failure to recognize the kingship of Jesus." (Meyer)

f. **They did not cease from their own doings:** Their sin was

**their own doings;** they couldn't blame it on anyone or anything else. In the same way, their sin was **their own** - they didn't learn it from God, but it came from their own corrupt natures.

g. **Nor from their stubborn way:** The ancient Hebrew word translated **stubborn** (also translated as *stiff-necked*) is a word that was also applied to Israel many time during the Exodus (Exo 32:9; Exo 33:3;

Exo 33:5). This shows that a change of location – even coming into the Promised Land – didn't necessarily mean a change of heart for Israel.

i. We should never count on sanctification by relocation; wherever you go, you take you with you. A new environment doesn't always mean a new attitude.

ii. The ancient Hebrew word for **stubborn** (*kawsheh*) comes from the idea of being hard or severe. To be stubborn against the LORD is to have a hard and unyielding heart; and it results in a hard life.

4. (20-23) *God gives them over to their sinful compromise.*

**Then the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and He said, "Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and has not heeded My voice, I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, so that through them I may test Israel, whether they will keep the ways of the LORD, to walk in them as their fathers kept *them*, or not."** Therefore the LORD left those nations, without driving them out immediately; nor did He deliver them into the hand of Joshua.

a. **Then the anger of the LORD was hot:** "He is not made all of mercy, as some dream, but can be angry: and 'who knoweth the power of his wrath?' (Psa 90:11). It is such as men can neither avoid nor abide." (Trapp)

b. **Because this nation has transgressed My covenant:** When God said, "**this nation**" instead of "My nation" it showed that Israel wasn't abiding in their relationship with God.

c. **I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left:** Israel wanted these

Canaanite nations around, so God gave them the worst punishment He could think of: He would allow it.

d. **Therefore the LORD left those nations:** After setting their hearts on sinful things, Israel found that God *gave* what their sinful hearts desired. This illustrates the great danger of setting our hearts on sinful things; we may get to the point where God may allow us to have them - thus bringing sin, bondage, and pain into our lives.

**Jdg 3:1** So then, the LORD left some nations in the land to test the Israelites who had not been through the wars in Canaan.

Jdg 3:2 He did this only in order to teach each generation of Israelites about war, especially those who had never been in battle before.

Jdg 3:3 Those left in the land were the five Philistine cities, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites who lived in the Lebanon Mountains from Mount Baal Hermon as far as Hamath Pass.

Jdg 3:4 They were to be a test for Israel, to find out whether or not the Israelites would obey the commands that the LORD had given their ancestors through Moses.

Jdg 3:5 And so the people of Israel settled down among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

Jdg 3:6 They intermarried with them and worshiped their gods.

### **Othniel**

Jdg 3:7 The people of Israel forgot the LORD their God; they sinned against him and worshiped the idols of Baal and Asherah.

Jdg 3:8 So the LORD became angry with Israel and let King Cushan Rishathaim of Mesopotamia conquer them. They

were subject to him for eight years.

Jdg 3:9 Then the Israelites cried out to the LORD, and he sent someone to free them. This was Othniel, the son of Caleb's younger brother Kenaz.

Jdg 3:10 The spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he became Israel's leader. Othniel went to war, and the LORD gave him the victory over the king of Mesopotamia.

Jdg 3:11 There was peace in the land for forty years, and then Othniel died.

## **Ehud**

Jdg 3:12 The people of Israel sinned against the LORD again. Because of this the LORD made King Eglon of Moab stronger than Israel.

Jdg 3:13 Eglon joined the Ammonites and the Amalekites; they defeated Israel and captured Jericho, the city of palm trees.

Jdg 3:14 The Israelites were subject to Eglon for eighteen years.

Jdg 3:15 Then the Israelites cried out to the LORD, and he sent someone to free them. This was Ehud, a left-handed man, who was the son of Gera, from the tribe of Benjamin. The people of Israel sent Ehud to King Eglon of Moab with gifts for him.

Jdg 3:16 Ehud had made himself a double-edged sword about a foot and a half long. He had it fastened on his right side under his clothes.

Jdg 3:17 Then he took the gifts to Eglon, who was a very fat man.

Jdg 3:18 When Ehud had given him the gifts, he told the men who had carried them to go back home.

Jdg 3:19 But Ehud himself turned back at the carved stones near Gilgal, went back to Eglon, and said, "Your Majesty, I have a secret message for you." So the king



ordered his servants, "Leave us alone!" And they all went out.

Jdg 3:20 Then, as the king was sitting there alone in his cool room on the roof, Ehud went over to him and said, "I have a message from God for you." The king stood up.

Jdg 3:21 With his left hand Ehud took the sword from his right side and plunged it into the king's belly.

Jdg 3:22 The whole sword went in, handle and all, and the fat covered it up. Ehud did not pull it out of the king's belly, and it stuck out behind, between his legs.

Jdg 3:23 Then Ehud went outside, closed the doors behind him, locked them,

Jdg 3:24 and left. The servants came and saw that the doors were locked, but they only thought that the king was inside, relieving himself.

Jdg 3:25 They waited as long as they thought they should, but when he still did not open the door, they took the key and opened it. And there was their master, lying dead on the floor.

Jdg 3:26 Ehud got away while they were waiting. He went past the carved stones and escaped to Seirah.

Jdg 3:27 When he arrived there in the hill country of Ephraim, he blew a trumpet to call the people of Israel to battle; then he led them down from the hills.

Jdg 3:28 He told them, "Follow me! The LORD has given you victory over your enemies, the Moabites." So they followed Ehud down and captured the place where the Moabites were to cross the Jordan; they did not allow anyone to cross.

Jdg 3:29 That day they killed about ten thousand of the best Moabite soldiers; none of them escaped.

Jdg 3:30 That day the Israelites defeated Moab, and there was peace in the land for eighty years.

## Shamgar

Jdg 3:31 The next leader was Shamgar son of Anath. He too rescued Israel, and did so by killing six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad.

## Judges 3:1-31

### Judges 3 - The First Three Judges

#### A. The pagan nations remaining in the territory of Israel.

*1. (1-2) Why God allowed these nations to continue in Israel's territory.*

**Now these *are* the nations which the LORD left, that He might test Israel by them, *that is*, all who had not known any of the wars in Canaan (*this was only so that the generations of the children of Israel might be taught to know war, at least those who had not formerly known it*),**

a. **These are the nations which the LORD left:** God left these Canaanite nations behind because Israel was not faithful in driving them out. One might rightly say that it was a combination of both their choice and God's will.

b. **That He might test Israel by them:** It was within the power of God to eliminate those pagan nations without any help from Israel. God allowed the troublesome peoples to remain for a reason. The word **test** here is used in the sense of "proving." These nations would remain because God wanted to *prove* the faithfulness of Israel to Himself, and to *improve* their reliance on Him.

i. God doesn't just instantly change *every* area of our lives so that our relationship with Him can be proved

and improved; so that we will live a life of true partnership with God.

c. **So that the generations of the children of Israel might be taught to know war:** This was another reason why God allowed the Canaanites to remain where Israel did not drive them out. God wanted His people to be *warriors*, and the presence of these dangerous neighbors would make it necessary for future **generations to know war.**

i. "Israel was to be in a hostile environment for the major part of her history, due either to the pressures of the petty kingdoms which surrounded her or, at a later stage, due to her strategic position between the successive world-powers of Assyria, Babylonia, Persia and Greece on the one hand and Egypt on the other hand. Military prowess was a necessary accomplishment, humanly speaking, if she was to survive." (Cundall)

ii. No one *likes* the struggle against sin, but the battle is good for us. The symbol of Christianity is a cross, not a feather bed.

2. (3-4) *The pagan nations are specifically listed.*

**Namely, five lords of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites who dwelt in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal Hermon to the entrance of Hamath. And they were *left, that He might test Israel by them, to know whether they would obey the commandments of the LORD, which He had commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses.***

a. **Namely:** God named each of the pagan peoples that stubbornly stayed in the land. After the same pattern, some could today make a specific list of "pagan territory" in the life of the believer. Such a list may indeed be

helpful in the way that it causes one to identify their enemy.

**b. That He might test Israel by them, to know whether they would obey:** The reason that God didn't just eliminate these nations is again stated. It was to *prove* Israel's commitment to God and His word. If they were obedient to the word of God the other nations would not hinder them and they would grow strong enough to drive them out completely.

## **B. The first judge: Othniel.**

### *1. (5-7) The apostasy of Israel in the days of Othniel.*

**Thus the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons; and they served their gods. So the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD. They forgot the LORD their God, and served the Baals and Asherahs.**

**a. They took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons:** Part of the accommodation of Israel to the pagan peoples surrounding them was their sin of intermarriage with the pagan nations in their midst.

**b. They forgot the LORD their God, and served the Baals and Asherahs:** Their ungodly romances led them to the worship of the pagan deities Baal and Ashtoreth.

i. Jesus told us that following Him would require that we give up the things we love most (Mar 10:29-30). Often an ungodly romance falls into this exact category.

### *2. (8) Israel's servitude to the king of Mesopotamia.*

**Therefore the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and He sold them into the hand of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia; and the children of Israel served Cushan-Rishathaim eight years.**

a. **He sold them into the hand of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia:** God gave Israel just what they wanted. They didn't want to serve God, so He allowed them to be in bondage to a pagan king. Israel reaped exactly what they sowed.

i. "The name of *Cushan-Rishathaim* is also suspect, for it reads literally 'Cushan of double wickedness', not likely a personal name, and it would appear that the historian has made a deliberate distortion to cast ridicule upon this oppressor." (Cundall)

ii. "A rather strange designation but perhaps intended to be an intimidating one. It could also be a caricature of the actual name." (Wolf)

iii. "Tyrants delight in terrible names and titles, as Attilas, the Hunne, who would needs be styled *Ira Dei et orbis vastitas*, the wrath of God, and waster of the world." (Trapp)

iv. In those ancient times, the word **Mesopotamia** described the fertile, well-watered area that would be today Eastern Syria and Northern Iraq.

b. **Eight years:** It was many years of bondage before Israel cried out unto the LORD.

3. (9-11) *God's deliverance through Othniel.*

**When the children of Israel cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the children of Israel, who delivered them: Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel. He went out to war, and the LORD delivered Cushan-Rishathaim king of**

**Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed over Cushan-Rishathaim. So the land had rest for forty years. Then Othniel the son of Kenaz died.**

a. **When the children of Israel cried out to the LORD:** After the eight years of bondage Israel finally cried out in dependence on God. It often takes many years of bondage and calamity before man looks away from self and looks unto God.

b. **The LORD raised up a deliverer...Othniel:** Othniel was the son-in-law of the great hero Caleb (Jdg 1:12-13) and his wife was also a woman of faith (Jdg 1:13-15).

i. In his collection of rabbinical fables and traditions titled *Legends of the Jews*, Louis Ginzberg includes two fanciful additions to the story of Othniel:

- "Among the judges, Othniel represents the class of scholars. His acumen was so great that he was able, by dint of dialectic reasoning, to restore the seventeen hundred traditions which Moses had taught the people, and which had been forgotten in the time of mourning for Moses."
- "Othniel, however, was held so little answerable for the causes that had brought on the punishment of the people, that God granted him eternal life; he is one of the few who reached Paradise alive."

c. **The Spirit of the LORD came upon him:** We don't know very much about Othniel, but this was enough to know. The Holy Spirit empowered him for the job God called him to do.

i. Othniel lived the principle of Zec 4:6 : *Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of hosts*. Empowered by the **Spirit of the LORD**, he delivered Israel.

- ii. "Since Pentecost (Acts 2) a more general and permanent endowment of the Holy Spirit has been the privilege of every disciple." (Cundall)

### **C. The second judge: Ehud.**

*1. (12-14) The cycle continues: Israel sins and is sold into servitude.*

**And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD strengthened Eglon king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD. Then he gathered to himself the people of Ammon and Amalek, went and defeated Israel, and took possession of the City of Palms. So the children of Israel served Eglon king of Moab eighteen years.**

a. **The children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD:** After God brought deliverance through the work of Othniel, Israel eventually drifted away from their dependence and obedience towards God. Their victory did not automatically last forever; it had to be maintained.

i. Cundall does a good job of describing the three peoples mentioned here as oppressors of Israel:

- "*Moab*, situated to the east of the Dead Sea between the Arnon and the Zered, was settled as a kingdom some fifty years before the Israelite invasion."
- "*Ammon*, to the north-east of Moab, was established about the same time as Israel in the late thirteenth century B.C."
- "The Amalekites, who were akin to the Edomites, were a nomadic race occupying the considerable area south of Judah, and were possibly Israel's bitterest enemy (Exo 17:8-16; cf. 1Sa 15:2-3)."

b. **The children of Israel served Eglon:** Israel's sin brought them into bondage. They suffered 8 years of bondage before they cried out to the LORD in the days of Othniel. Then they endured another 18 stubborn years of bondage before they cried out to the LORD.

i. Sin always brings bondage, though it comes to us deceptively. The fish never contemplates the bondage of the hook when it goes after the bait; Satan snares us by making the bait attractive and hiding the hook.

ii. "Some great men have borne names which, when reduced to their grammatical meaning, appear very ridiculous: the word *Eglon* signifies *a little calf!*" (Clarke) In Eglon's case, it was a fatted calf and was ready for slaughter.

2. (15) *God raises up a deliverer for Israel: Ehud.*

**But when the children of Israel cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for them: Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man. By him the children of Israel sent tribute to Eglon king of Moab.**

a. **When the children of Israel cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer:** This shows the mercy of God. When Israel repeatedly drifted from God, He had every right to cast them off completely. Yet He still responded when they finally did call on Him for deliverance.

b. **Ehud... a left-handed man:** In the ancient world left-handed people were often forced to become right-handed. This made Ehud's standing as **a left-handed man** more unusual.

i. "He is described as a *left-handed* man, literally 'restricted as to his right hand'. In the eyes of an Israelite, this was regarded as a physical defect and it appears often in connection with the Benjaminites,



without affecting their prowess in battle (cf. 20:16)."  
(Cundall)

*3. (16-26) Ehud's daring assassination of Eglon.*

**Now Ehud made himself a dagger (it was double-edged and a cubit in length) and fastened it under his clothes on his right thigh. So he brought the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. (Now Eglon was a very fat man.) And when he had finished presenting the tribute, he sent away the people who had carried the tribute. But he himself turned back from the stone images that were at Gilgal, and said, "I have a secret message for you, O king." He said, "Keep silence!" And all who attended him went out from him. And Ehud came to him (now he was sitting upstairs in his cool private chamber). Then Ehud said, "I have a message from God for you." So he arose from *his* seat. Then Ehud reached with his left hand, took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly. Even the hilt went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the dagger out of his belly; and his entrails came out. Then Ehud went out through the porch and shut the doors of the upper room behind him and locked them. When he had gone out, Eglon's servants came to look, and *to their* surprise, the doors of the upper room were locked. So they said, "He is probably attending to his needs in the cool chamber." So they waited till they were embarrassed, and still he had not opened the doors of the upper room. Therefore they took the key and opened *them*. And there was their master, fallen dead on the floor. But Ehud had escaped while they delayed, and passed beyond the stone images and escaped to Seirah.**

a. **He brought the tribute to Eglon king of Moab:** Israel had to pay this **tribute** money because they were under the domination of the king of Moab. Ehud came to Eglon as a messenger or courier.

i. "Since the payment was carried by a number of men, it may have been food or wool." (Wolf)

ii. "Presents, tribute, etc., in the eastern countries were offered with very great ceremony; and to make the more parade several persons, ordinarily slaves, sumptuously dressed, and in considerable *number*, were employed to carry what would not be a burden even to *one*. This appears to have been the case in the present instance." (Clarke)

b. **I have a message from God for you:** Ehud certainly told the truth when he said this. The message was, "Those who oppress the people of God touch the apple of His eye and will be judged for it."

i. F.B. Meyer set forth some thoughts from Jdg 3:20, and Ehud's statement to Eglon, **I have a message from God for you.**

- *God's messages are often secret.*
- *God's messages must be received with reverence.*
- *God's messages leap out from unexpected quarters.*
- *God's messages are sharp as a two-edged sword, and cause death.*

ii. "God's Word pierces as a two-edged sword to the dividing of soul and spirit in the recesses of the being, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. When the Eglon of self has received its death-wound, the glad trumpet of freedom is blown on the hills." (Meyer)

iii. God uses many messengers to speak to us, including death. "Ehud said, 'I have a message from God for thee.' It was a dagger which found its way to Eglon's heart, and he fell dead. So shall death deliver his message to you. 'I have a message from God unto thee,' he will say, and ere you shall have time to answer, you shall find that this was the message, 'Because I the Lord will do this, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel; thus saith the Lord, cut it down; why cumberest thou the ground! Set thy house in order, for thou shalt die and not live.' Oh! may you hear the other messengers of God before he sends this last most potent one, from which ye cannot turn away." (Spurgeon)

iv. The preacher should also present the word of God with the sense that he has a message from God. "I am afraid, there are some ministers who hardly think that the gospel is intended to come personally home to the people. They talk, as I read of one the other day, who said that when he preached to sinners he did not like to look the congregation in the face, for fear they should think he meant to be personal; so he looked up at the ventilator, because there was no fear then of any individual catching his eye. Oh! That fear of man has been the ruin of many ministers. They never dared to preach right at the people." (Spurgeon)

c. **Ehud reached with his left hand:** Because most men fought with their right hand, it wasn't expected for a man to use his left hand with a dagger or a sword. This shows how cunning Ehud was and how unexpected the strike was to Eglon.

i. **The fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the dagger out of his belly; and his**

**entrails came out:** "This is variously understood: either the contents of the bowels issued through the wound, or he had an evacuation in the natural way through the *fright* and *anguish*." (Clarke)

ii. The phrase **and his entrails came out** has caused some problems for translators. One of the words used occurs nowhere else in the Old Testament. "The most plausible, if gruesome, suggestion is that it refers to the opening of the king's body, the downward motion of the dagger being with such force that it passed completely through the abdomen and projected from the vent (*cf.* RV, *it came out behind*). Such sensational details have a habit of impressing themselves indelibly upon the human memory." (Cundall)

iii. "The KJV and RSV translate 'and the dirt came out,' implying an intestinal discharge caused by the sword thrust. Koehler-Baumgartner relates the word to the Akkadian *parasdinum* ('hole'), meaning that Ehud went out through an 'escape hole.' The construction is very similar to 'Ehud went out to the porch' in Jdg 3:23." (Wolf)

iv. Some are troubled by this act of assassination; we cannot say that this event is a general approval or commission of those who would assassinate rulers who oppress the people of God. It is significant that this was never suggested or even an issue in the early Christian persecutions. "God did not necessarily approve of the method used by Ehud. It may be significant that the Spirit of the Lord did not come on Ehud and that he was never described as 'judging Israel.'" (Wolf)

v. Nevertheless, the Bible reliably records this incident without giving specific approval of this act of

assassination. "Such incidental details as the length of the murder weapon and the fact of Eglon's corpulence (mentioned only because the dagger was completely buried in his body) attest to the historicity of the event." (Cundall)

d. **He is probably attending to his needs in the cool chamber:** Without being coarse, we can see how real and true-to-life the Bible is. It describes normal, everyday functions but in a dignified way.

i. **Attending to his needs** is literally "covering his feet," a euphemism for elimination also used in 1Sa 24:3. Some commentators see this only reluctantly: "He has lain down on his sofa in order to sleep; when this was done they dropped their slippers, lifted up their feet, and covered them with their long loose garments. But the *versions*, in general seem to understand it as implying a certain natural act." (Clarke)

ii. The **stone images** mentioned in Jdg 3:19; Jdg 3:26 were probably "the actual stones set up by Joshua to commemorate the miraculous crossing of the Jordan (Jos 4:19-24) and thus were a well-known landmark." (Cundall)

4. (27-30) *Ehud leads the Israelites in battle against the Moabites.*

**And it happened, when he arrived, that he blew the trumpet in the mountains of Ephraim, and the children of Israel went down with him from the mountains; and he led them. Then he said to them, "Follow me, for the LORD has delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand." So they went down after him, seized the fords of the Jordan leading to Moab, and did not allow anyone to cross over. And at that time they killed about ten thousand men of Moab,**

**all stout men of valor; not a man escaped. So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest for eighty years.**

a. **And he led them:** As much cunning and courage as Ehud had, he could not do the work by himself. It was essential for brave and faithful men to rally around him. Ehud led, but he had to have followers.

i. In the same way, God lifts up leaders in the church, but they can't do the work by themselves. The whole body needs to work together.

b. **Follow me, for the LORD has delivered:** Ehud asked the Israelites to **follow** him, because he was their leader. Yet he also encouraged them to look with faith to the LORD (**for the LORD has delivered your enemies into your hand**).

i. Like any true leader, Ehud said "**follow me.**" A leader can't expect his followers to go where he or she will not or has not gone. "This was captain-like spoken. Caesar never said to his soldiers, *Ite*, Go ye, but *Venite*, Come along: I will lead you, neither shall ye go farther than ye have me before you. Hannibal was wont to be first in the battle, and last out." (Trapp)

c. **And the land had rest for eighty years:** Ehud's cunning and courage, coupled with Israel's faithful following of a leader, brought Israel's longest period of freedom under the 400-year period of the Judges. Ehud is a dramatic example of how in the LORD, one man can make a difference, and how God will call others to work with that one man.

#### **D. The third judge: Shamgar.**

1. (31a) *The brief story of Shamgar.*

**After him was Shamgar the son of Anath,**

a. **Shamgar the son of Anath:** Shamgar is one of six individuals we call “minor” judges, because not much is written about them. Yet the work they did for God was just as important in their day as anyone else’s work.

2. (31b) *Shamgar’s great accomplishment.*

**Who killed six hundred men of the Philistines with an ox goad; and he also delivered Israel.**

a. **Killed six hundred men of the Philistines:** Shamgar was a man of great accomplishment, yet only one verse describes his work. It is possible that so little is said about Shamgar because his story was so well known.

i. “The significant omissions may indicate that there was something unusual about Shamgar; he may not have been a judge after the usual pattern but just a warrior who effected this one local stroke of valour against a nation who afterwards became Israel’s principle oppressor.” (Cundall)

b. **With an ox goad:** Shamgar is an excellent example of serving for God. He simply used what God put in his hand - in his case, an **ox goad**.

i. An ox goad was a stick about 8 feet long (about 2.5 meters), and about 6 inches around at the big end. One end of the ox goad was pointy (for poking the ox), and the other end was like a chisel (for scraping the plow clean of dirt).

ii. “In the hands of a strong, skilful man, such an instrument must be more dangerous and more fatal than any sword.” (Clarke)

c. **He also delivered Israel:** There was nothing spectacular about an ox goad. But God can use, and wants to use, whatever is in our hands. Shamgar was merely a laborer doing his job; but he took what was in

his hand when prompted by God and he rescued the people of God from their enemies.

i. Shamgar was like Moses and his shepherd's staff or David and his shepherd's sling. God uses simple things to accomplish great things.

## **Deborah and Barak**

**Jdg 4:1** After Ehud died, the people of Israel sinned against the LORD again.

Jdg 4:2 So the LORD let them be conquered by Jabin, a Canaanite king who ruled in the city of Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who lived at Harosheth-of-the-Gentiles.

Jdg 4:3 Jabin had nine hundred iron chariots, and he ruled the people of Israel with cruelty and violence for twenty years. Then the people of Israel cried out to the LORD for help.

Jdg 4:4 Now Deborah, the wife of Lappidoth, was a prophet, and she was serving as a judge for the Israelites at that time.

Jdg 4:5 She would sit under a certain palm tree between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the people of Israel would go there for her decisions.

Jdg 4:6 One day she sent for Barak son of Abinoam from the city of Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, "The LORD, the God of Israel, has given you this command: 'Take ten thousand men from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead them to Mount Tabor.

Jdg 4:7 I will bring Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, to fight you at the Kishon River. He will have his chariots and soldiers, but I will give you victory over him.' "

Jdg 4:8 Then Barak replied, "I will go if you go with me, but if you don't go with me, I won't go either."



Jdg 4:9 She answered, "All right, I will go with you, but you won't get any credit for the victory, because the LORD will hand Sisera over to a woman." So Deborah set off for Kedesh with Barak.

Jdg 4:10 Barak called the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh, and ten thousand men followed him. Deborah went with him.

Jdg 4:11 In the meantime Heber the Kenite had set up his tent close to Kedesh near the oak tree at Zaanannim. He had moved away from the other Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, the brother-in-law of Moses.

Jdg 4:12 When Sisera learned that Barak had gone up to Mount Tabor,

Jdg 4:13 he called out his nine hundred iron chariots and all his men, and sent them from Harosheth-of-the-Gentiles to the Kishon River.

Jdg 4:14 Then Deborah said to Barak, "Go! The LORD is leading you! Today he has given you victory over Sisera." So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with his ten thousand men.

Jdg 4:15 When Barak attacked with his army, the LORD threw Sisera into confusion together with all his chariots and men. Sisera got down from his chariot and fled on foot.

Jdg 4:16 Barak pursued the chariots and the army to Harosheth-of-the-Gentiles, and Sisera's whole army was killed. Not a man was left.

Jdg 4:17 Sisera ran away to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because King Jabin of Hazor was at peace with Heber's family.

Jdg 4:18 Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, "Come in, sir; come into my tent. Don't be afraid." So he went in, and she hid him behind a curtain.

Jdg 4:19 He said to her, "Please give me a drink of water; I'm thirsty." She opened a leather bag of milk, gave him a

drink, and hid him again.

Jdg 4:20 Then he told her, "Stand at the door of the tent, and if anyone comes and asks you if anyone is here, say no."

Jdg 4:21 Sisera was so tired that he fell sound asleep. Then Jael took a hammer and a tent peg, quietly went up to him, and killed him by driving the peg right through the side of his head and into the ground.

Jdg 4:22 When Barak came looking for Sisera, Jael went out to meet him and said to him, "Come here! I'll show you the man you're looking for." So he went in with her, and there was Sisera on the ground, dead, with the tent peg through his head.

Jdg 4:23 That day God gave the Israelites victory over Jabin, the Canaanite king.

Jdg 4:24 They pressed harder and harder against him until they destroyed him.

## **Judges 4:1-24**

### **Judges 4 - Deborah and Barak**

#### **A. Deborah, the fourth Judge.**

*1. (1-3) The cycle begins again: apostasy, servitude and supplication.*

**When Ehud was dead, the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who dwelt in Harosheth Hagoyim. And the children of Israel cried out to the LORD; for Jabin had nine hundred chariots of iron, and for twenty years he harshly oppressed the children of Israel.**

**a. When Ehud was dead, the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD:** Seeing the

continual drift to disobedience makes one less and less confident of man but more and more impressed with the mercy and grace of God. Though Israel kept forsaking Him, He kept working with them.

i. "The sedentary life is most subject to diseases: standing waters soon putrify. It is hard and happy not to grow worse with liberty." (Trapp)

b. **So the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan:** God loved Israel too much to let them go their own way. There may be times when we wish God would leave us alone; yet we are ultimately thankful for His continued dealing with us, even when it isn't comfortable.

i. Even when God deals with one in this way, it still may take a good while until they turn their heart in repentance Him. It took Israel twenty years of bondage before they **cried out to the LORD**.

c. **Jabin king of Canaan:** God used an entirely different oppressor this time. God can, and will, use anything to get our attention and keep us in line with His will.

2. (4-5) *Deborah: a prophetess and a judge for Israel.*

**And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time. And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.**

a. **And Deborah, a prophetess:** Some consider it unexpected for God to raise up a woman as prophetess. But the New Testament makes it clear that God grants the gift of prophecy unto women also, and they are to practice it appropriately (1Co 11:5).

i. "*Lapidoth*, her husband, appears to have had no hand in the government. But the original may as well

be translated *a woman of Lapidoth, as the wife of Lapidoth.*" (Clarke)

ii. The Bible tells us of several other prophetesses: Miriam (Exo 15:20), Huldah (2Ki 22:14), Anna (Luk 2:36), and Philip's four daughters (Act 21:8-9).

iii. From 1Co 11:5, we find that the essential element to a woman's ministry as a prophetess in the early church was her clear submission to the male leadership in the church (evidenced by her wearing of a veil). In the New Testament church, a woman was to use her gifts in the context of order established by the leaders of the church - just like anyone's gift.

iv. This is always possible because the gift of prophecy never "overwhelms" the one who receives it; *the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets* (1Co 14:32).

b. **She judged Israel at that time:** Still more people consider it unexpected for God to raise up a woman to be a judge - a *shaphat*, a heroic leader for Israel. Deborah was a woman greatly used by God and she was also a woman who respected the people God put in authority over her - notably, Barak.

i. The issue, from a New Testament perspective, is not whether women can be used greatly by God. *Of course they can.* The issues are of headship, final accountability, and authority - and God has granted these responsibilities to men in both the home and the church. Women can be used greatly by God, but it is to be under the headship of male authority in the church.

ii. The reasons have nothing to do with any notion of male superiority; they have to do with God's ordained order (1Co 11:3), in light of God's order of creation

(1Co 11:8-9), in light of the presence of watching angels (1Co 11:10), and in light of the nature of the fall (1Ti 2:14).

iii. The reasons also have nothing to do with any notion or even the suggestion of female inferiority. Jesus was under the headship and authority of His Father (Joh 5:19) without being inferior in any way (Joh 1:1; Joh 10:30).

c. **And the children of Israel came up to her for judgment:** Often it is assumed that Deborah was allowed leadership because unspecified men failed to take the position. While later we will see that Barak doesn't seem to be all he should be, we have no indication that he failed to do something God told him to do in taking leadership.

i. Wolf notes, "Her prominence implies a lack of qualified and willing men." Yet this can be regarded as no more than an *implication*, not specifically stated in the text.

3. (6-7) *Deborah calls Barak with a message from God.*

**Then she sent and called for Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, "Has not the LORD God of Israel commanded, 'Go and deploy *troops* at Mount Tabor; take with you ten thousand men of the sons of Naphtali and of the sons of Zebulun; and against you I will deploy Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude at the River Kishon; and I will deliver him into your hand'?"**

a. **And she sent and called for Barak:** Deborah never believed that God called her alone to deliver Israel. She realized that God would do much of the work through Barak.

b. **Has not the LORD God of Israel commanded:** The use of this phrase suggests that Deborah simply *confirmed* something that the LORD had already spoken to Barak. God often brings confirmation when He speaks to us, especially if what we believe He wants us to do will affect other people.

4. (8-10) *Barak will only lead if Deborah accompanies.*

**And Barak said to her, "If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go!" So she said, "I will surely go with you; nevertheless there will be no glory for you in the journey you are taking, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh. And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; he went up with ten thousand men under his command, and Deborah went up with him.**

a. **If you will go with me, then I will go:** It didn't seem unwise of Barak to ask Deborah to come with him. Yet the fact that he *demand*ed it showed that he trusted more in Deborah's relationship with God than with his own relationship with God.

i. "Barak preferred the inspiration of Deborah's presence to the invisible but certain help of Almighty God...He is mentioned in Hebrews 11 as one of the heroes of faith; but his faith lay rather in Deborah's influence with God than in his own. Thus he missed the crown of that great day of victory." (Meyer)

ii. "He is famous for his faith (Heb 11:32-33), and yet here he showeth some unbelief. Let us be faithful in weakness, though but weak in faith." (Trapp)

b. **There will be no glory for you:** Because of this, Barak would not be the one to personally defeat Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army - but a woman would be

the one. We would expect this to be fulfilled by Deborah, but this prophecy will be fulfilled unexpectedly.

**c. He went up with ten thousand men under his command:** Nevertheless, Barak and all who went with him showed real courage and trust in God to go out against Sisera and his army. They had essentially no weapons to fight with against a technologically advanced army (having 900 chariots of iron). In addition, God led them to fight on a plain, which gave great advantage to the forces with chariots.

### **C. Israel's defeat of Sisera.**

*1. (11-13) The armies gather together against one another.*

**Now Heber the Kenite, of the children of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, had separated himself from the Kenites and pitched his tent near the terebinth tree at Zaanaim, which is beside Kedesh. And they reported to Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor. So Sisera gathered together all his chariots, nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people who were with him, from Harosheth Hagoyim to the River Kishon.**

**a. Heber the Kenite:** These were distant descendants of Israel, through Jethro, the priest of Midian and the **father-in-law of Moses**, back to Abraham and his second wife Keturah (Gen 25:1-4).

**b. So Sisera gathered together all his chariots, nine hundred chariots of iron:** This was sophisticated and impressive military technology. The armies of Israel, under the direction of Barak and Deborah, were at a great disadvantage.

*2. (14-16) Sisera and his army are utterly defeated.*

**Then Deborah said to Barak, "Up! For this is the day in which the LORD has delivered Sisera into your**

hand. Has not the LORD gone out before you?" So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following him. And the LORD routed Sisera and all *his* chariots and all *his* army with the edge of the sword before Barak; and Sisera alighted from *his* chariot and fled away on foot. But Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth Hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not a man was left.

a. **So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men:** This was a wonderful act of faith on the part of Barak, who moved to a battleground where his armies were at a great disadvantage against the enemy's chariots.

i. "He doth not make use of the advantage of the hill, where he might have been out of the reach of his iron chariots, Jos 17:16, but boldly marcheth down into the valley, to give Sisera the opportunity of using all his horses and chariots, that so the victory might be more glorious and wonderful." (Poole)

b. **And the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots:** Because of Barak's great trust in God (as well as the trust his armies had in the LORD), God granted them a great victory against great odds.

i. **Routed:** "Terrified, as the vulgar Latin hath it, perhaps by thunder and hailstones, as Jos 10:10; 1Sa 7:10, where the same Hebrew word is used; or else by some hurry-noise made in the air by the angels, as 2 Kings 6; but something was certainly done from heaven." (Trapp)

c. **The LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots:** We know from Jdg 5:4-5; Jdg 5:21 that God helped Israel to victory by bringing a flash flood. The muddy conditions



made the chariots of iron a hindrance, not a help in the battle.

d. **Has not the LORD gone out before you:** This is a phrase that speaks of a king or general leading his troops (1Sa 8:20). Therefore, Deborah played a big role in this victory. She was an encourager, building up the faith of Barak and his men. Her encouragement was that God, as a king, would go out before His people into battle.

3. (17-22) *The death of Sisera by the hand of a woman.*

**However, Sisera had fled away on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite; for *there was* peace between Jabin king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite. And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said to him, "Turn aside, my lord, turn aside to me; do not fear." And when he had turned aside with her into the tent, she covered him with a blanket. Then he said to her, "Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty." So she opened a jug of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him. And he said to her, "Stand at the door of the tent, and if any man comes and inquires of you, and says, 'Is there any man here?' you shall say, 'No.'"** Then Jael, Heber's wife, took a tent peg and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and it went down into the ground; for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died. And then, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said to him, "Come, I will show you the man whom you seek." And when he went into her *tent*, there lay Sisera, dead with the peg in his temple.

a. **Sisera had fled away on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite:** Here the story takes an unexpected turn. God promised that a woman would defeat Sisera (Jdg 4:9). We would logically assume that

this would be Deborah, but God had something else in mind. He instead used the wife of a **Kenite** to accomplish Sisera's end.

i. "Women had their tents apart from their husbands, Gen 24:67; Gen 31:33. And here he thought to lurk more securely than in her husband's tent." (Poole)

b. **Turn aside, my lord, turn aside to me; do not fear:** Because **there was peace between** the people of Sisera and the people of Jael, he had reason to believe he could trust Jael's invitation.

i. In addition, "Any pursuer would hardly think to look in a woman's tent for any man, let alone a weary fugitive, for this would be a breach of etiquette." (Cundall)

ii. "This was a promise of security, and therefore she cannot be excused from dissimulation and treachery in the manner, though the substance of her act was lawful and worthy." (Poole)

c. **Drove the peg into his temple:** The gory detail of this matter supports the idea that this was an eye-witness account. Jael knew how to handle a tent-peg because it was customarily the job of women to set up the tents. She struck the peg so hard that **it went down into the ground**.

i. "Lo, there lay this proud worms' meat sprawling, with his head fastened to the ground, as if it had been now listening to what was become of the soul." (Trapp)

ii. Jael broke a fundamental principle of hospitality and many in the ancient world would think her a treacherous woman. She broke her promise to Sisera and killed a man that her own husband had made peace with.

iii. Yet God used even her treachery to accomplish His purpose. Surely, Sisera deserved to die; he fought against God's people on behalf of a leader who had *harshly oppressed the people of Israel* (Jdg 4:3). The lesson for us is important - God can make even the evil of man serve His purpose: *Surely the wrath of man shall praise You* (Psa 76:10). Yet, that *never* diminishes the personal responsibility of the one doing the evil. Judas' betrayal of Jesus served the eternal purpose of God, yet he still answered for that evil deed.

iv. "She was encouraged to do it, partly, by observing that the heavens and all the elements conspired against him, as against one devoted to destruction; partly by the fair opportunity which God's providence put into her hands; and principally, by the secret instinct of God inciting her to it, and assuring her of success in it." (Poole)

v. "But we do not find one word from Jael herself, stating how she was led to do an act repugnant to her feelings as a woman, contrary to good faith, and a breach of the rules of hospitality. Nor does the sacred penman say one word to explain the case; as in the case of Ehud, he states the fact, and leaves his readers to form their own opinion." (Clarke)

vi. Charles Spurgeon preached a wonderful sermon on this passage titled *Sin Slain* on how we can take Sisera as a type of sin, and his master (Jabin) as a type of Satan. He insisted that we should not be content to merely *defeat* sin, as Barak defeated Sisera in battle; we should not rest until sin is *dead*. And, just as Jael asked Barak to look at the dead body of Sisera, Spurgeon said we should look at sin slain by the work of Jesus, knowing He has already

won the battle. "If you are content merely to conquer your sins and not to kill them, you may depend upon it, it is the mere work of morality — a surface work — and not the work of the Holy Spirit." (Spurgeon)

4. (23-24) *After this decisive battle, full victory soon won for Israel.*

**So on that day God subdued Jabin king of Canaan in the presence of the children of Israel. And the hand of the children of Israel grew stronger and stronger against Jabin king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.**

a. **And the hand of the children of Israel grew stronger and stronger:** The battle against Sisera was important, but it did not end the struggle. It was an important *event* that Israel had to continue to develop and walk in.

b. **Until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan:** The war was not over until **Jabin** was **destroyed**. Israel could not think the war was over when a great battle was won.

### **The Song of Deborah and Barak**

**Jdg 5:1** On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang this song:

Jdg 5:2 Praise the LORD! The Israelites were determined to fight; the people gladly volunteered.

Jdg 5:3 Listen, you kings! Pay attention, you rulers! I will sing and play music to Israel's God, the LORD.

Jdg 5:4 LORD, when you left the mountains of Seir, when you came out of the region of Edom, the earth shook, and rain fell from the sky. Yes, water poured down from the clouds.

Jdg 5:5 The mountains quaked before the LORD of Sinai, before the LORD, the God of Israel.

Jdg 5:6 In the days of Shamgar son of Anath, in the days of Jael, caravans no longer went through the land, and travelers used the back roads.

Jdg 5:7 The towns of Israel stood abandoned, Deborah; they stood empty until you came, came like a mother for Israel.

Jdg 5:8 Then there was war in the land when the Israelites chose new gods. Of the forty thousand men in Israel, did anyone carry shield or spear?

Jdg 5:9 My heart is with the commanders of Israel, with the people who gladly volunteered. Praise the LORD!

Jdg 5:10 Tell of it, you that ride on white donkeys, sitting on saddles, and you that must walk wherever you go.

Jdg 5:11 Listen! The noisy crowds around the wells are telling of the LORD's victories, the victories of Israel's people! Then the LORD's people marched down from their cities.

Jdg 5:12 Lead on, Deborah, lead on! Lead on! Sing a song! Lead on! Forward, Barak son of Abinoam, lead your captives away!

Jdg 5:13 Then the faithful ones came down to their leaders; the LORD's people came to him ready to fight.

Jdg 5:14 They came from Ephraim into the valley, behind the tribe of Benjamin and its people. The commanders came down from Machir, the officers down from Zebulun.

Jdg 5:15 The leaders of Issachar came with Deborah; yes, Issachar came and Barak too, and they followed him into the valley. But the tribe of Reuben was divided; they could not decide to come.

Jdg 5:16 Why did they stay behind with the sheep? To listen to shepherds calling the flocks? Yes, the tribe of Reuben was divided; they could not decide to come.

Jdg 5:17 The tribe of Gad stayed east of the Jordan, and the tribe of Dan remained by the ships. The tribe of Asher

stayed by the seacoast; they remained along the shore.

Jdg 5:18 But the people of Zebulun and Naphtali risked their lives on the battlefield.

Jdg 5:19 At Taanach, by the stream of Megiddo, the kings came and fought; the kings of Canaan fought, but they took no silver away.

Jdg 5:20 The stars fought from the sky; as they moved across the sky, they fought against Sisera.

Jdg 5:21 A flood in the Kishon swept them away—the onrushing Kishon River. I shall march, march on, with strength!

Jdg 5:22 Then the horses came galloping on, stamping the ground with their hoofs.

Jdg 5:23 "Put a curse on Meroz," says the angel of the LORD, "a curse, a curse on those who live there. They did not come to help the LORD, come as soldiers to fight for him."

Jdg 5:24 The most fortunate of women is Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite—the most fortunate of women who live in tents.

Jdg 5:25 Sisera asked for water, but she gave him milk; she brought him cream in a beautiful bowl.

Jdg 5:26 She took a tent peg in one hand, a worker's hammer in the other; she struck Sisera and crushed his skull; she pierced him through the head.

Jdg 5:27 He sank to his knees, fell down and lay still at her feet. At her feet he sank to his knees and fell; he fell to the ground, dead.

Jdg 5:28 Sisera's mother looked out of the window; she gazed from behind the lattice. "Why is his chariot so late in coming?" she asked. "Why are his horses so slow to return?"

Jdg 5:29 Her wisest friends answered her, and she told herself over and over,

Jdg 5:30 "They are only finding things to capture and divide, a woman or two for every soldier, rich cloth for Sisera, embroidered pieces for the neck of the queen."

Jdg 5:31 So may all your enemies die like that, O LORD, but may your friends shine like the rising sun! And there was peace in the land for forty years.

## **Judges 5:1-31**

### **Judges 5 - The Song of Deborah**

#### **A. Blessing God for the deliverance He brings through His leaders.**

*1. (1-2) Theme of the song: The joy and blessing in being a willing instrument of God.*

**Then Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang on that day, saying:**

**"When leaders lead in Israel,  
When the people willingly offer themselves,  
Bless the LORD!"**

a. **Then Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang that day:** This song is commonly attributed only to Deborah; Barak's role in the composition and perhaps performance of the song is often overlooked.

i. This song is well within the tradition of other Jewish songs of deliverance and celebration, such as Miriam's song (Exo 15:20-21) and the songs celebrating David's victory over Goliath (1Sa 18:7). "Deborah was a poetess as well as a prophetess." (Trapp)

ii. "Deborah sang concerning the overthrow of Israel's enemies, and the deliverance vouchsafed to the tribes: we have a far richer theme for music; we have

been delivered from worse enemies, and saved by a greater salvation. Let our gratitude be deeper; let our song be more jubilant.” (Spurgeon)

iii. “When he had been most slandered — when the Pope had launched out a new bull, and when the kings of the earth had threatened him fiercely — Luther would gather together his friends, and say, ‘Come let us sing a psalm and spite the devil.’ He would ever sing the most psalms when the world roared the most.” (Spurgeon)

b. **When leaders lead:** Leadership is important in any endeavor and especially in the work of God. God expects leaders among His people to actually **lead**, showing there is a genuine need for leaders and their leadership.

c. **When the people willingly offer themselves:** Leaders are nothing without followers, and it is the job of **the people** to **willingly offer themselves** to their leaders.

i. We can think of the relation between leader and people as that of the conductor and the orchestra. The conductor *must* lead, and the orchestra *must* be ready and willing to follow the conductor’s leadership. When the conductor does his job and the orchestra does their job, then beautiful music is made.

2. (3-5) *Remembering God’s preservation of Israel in the past.*

**“Hear, O kings! Give ear, O princes!  
I, even I, will sing to the LORD;  
I will sing praise to the LORD God of Israel.  
LORD, when You went out from Seir,  
When You marched from the field of Edom,  
The earth trembled and the heavens poured,  
The clouds also poured water;**



**The mountains gushed before the LORD,  
This Sinai, before the LORD God of Israel."**

a. **LORD, when You went out from Seir:** God won the victory for Israel over Sisera by sending a great rain (**the heavens poured**). In this song Deborah recalled a time when God did the same thing on behalf of Israel in the days of the Exodus (Deu 33:2).

b. **When You marched from the field of Edom:** It is good for us to remember that God's goodness to us didn't just start today. He has been good to us for a long, long, time.

i. "Seir and Edom are the same place; and these two expressions note the same thing, even God's marching in the head of his people from Seir or Edom towards the land of Canaan." (Poole)

*3. (6-8) Describing life under Canaanite oppression.*

**"In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath,  
In the days of Jael,  
The highways were deserted,  
And the travelers walked along the byways.  
Village life ceased, it ceased in Israel,  
Until I, Deborah, arose,  
Arose a mother in Israel.  
They chose new gods;  
Then *there was* war in the gates;  
Not a shield or spear was seen among forty thousand  
in Israel."**

a. **Village life ceased, it ceased in Israel:** Not only was life hard under Israel's oppressors, but they also confiscated all weapons, so the Israelites could not fight (**Not a shield or spear was seen among forty thousand in Israel**).

i. "The land was full of anarchy and confusion, being everywhere infested with banditti. No public road was safe; and in going from place to place, the people were obliged to use unfrequented paths." (Clarke)

ii. By spiritual analogy, we can say that Satan doesn't only want to oppress the Christian; he also wants to *disarm* the believer. He wants the believer to lay down the full armor of God that belongs to you in Jesus Christ (Eph 6:12-18).

b. **Until I, Deborah, arose:** This wasn't necessarily pride on Deborah's part. She understood that God works through willing individuals, and she was the willing one in this crisis.

4. (9) *Refrain: Bless the **LORD** for leaders who lead and followers who follow.*

**My heart is with the rulers of Israel**

**Who offered themselves willingly with the people.**

**Bless the LORD!**

a. **My heart is with the rulers of Israel:** Deborah didn't only care for *her* job of leadership. She also had a **heart** for other leaders and their work. Her vision was bigger than just getting "her job" done. She wanted to see the Kingdom of God advanced.

b. **Who offered themselves willingly with the people:** In Jdg 5:2 Deborah spoke of the people offering themselves willingly. Here she notes that the sacrifices should also be borne by the leaders. They also must offer **themselves willingly**.

**B. The victory remembered.**

1. (10-12) *A call to recount the great victory.*

**"Speak, you who ride on white donkeys,  
Who sit in judges' attire,**

**And who walk along the road.  
Far from the noise of the archers, among the watering  
places,  
There they shall recount the righteous acts of the  
LORD,  
The righteous acts *for* His villagers in Israel;  
Then the people of the LORD shall go down to the  
gates.  
Awake, awake, Deborah!  
Awake, awake, sing a song!  
Arise, Barak, and lead your captives away,  
O son of Abinoam!"**

a. **Speak, you who ride on white donkeys:** The song asked the civic leaders along with Deborah and Barak to tell the **villagers in Israel** the great things God did.

i. We should never hide our light under a bushel (Mat 5:15-16) but tell others of the great things God has done and is doing. Many need to wake up and sing a song of praise to the **LORD**.

b. **For His villagers in Israel:** The common people *needed* to hear of God's great works, and it was the job of leaders to *tell* them.

*2. (13-18) The tribes that helped and the tribes that didn't help.*

**"Then the survivors came down, the people against the nobles;**

**The LORD came down for me against the mighty.**

**From Ephraim were those whose roots were in Amalek.**

**After you, Benjamin, with your peoples,**

**From Machir rulers came down,**

**And from Zebulun those who bear the recruiter's staff.**

**And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah;**

**As Issachar, so was Barak  
Sent into the valley under his command;  
Among the divisions of Reuben  
There were great resolves of heart.  
Why did you sit among the sheepfolds,  
To hear the pipings for the flocks?  
The divisions of Reuben have great searchings of  
heart.  
Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan,  
And why did Dan remain on ships?  
Asher continued at the seashore,  
And stayed by his inlets.  
Zebulun *is* a people *who* jeopardized their lives to the  
point of death,  
Naphtali also, on the heights of the battlefield.**

a. **The LORD came down for me against the mighty:**  
As she remembered God's help, Deborah knew that His help came from the tribes of Israel, stirred to join in the battle. Deborah praised the tribes that helped, notably Ephraim, West Manasseh, Benjamin, Zebulun, Issachar, and Naphtali.

b. **Why did you sit among the sheepfolds:** Not every tribe was helpful. Reuben, East Manasseh, Dan, and Asher did not join in the battle.

i. "All these are worthily shamed and shented, though they were not without some sorry pleas and pretences. The labouring Church must be some way helped, if be but by our prayers." (Trapp)

3. (19-23) *The battle described and a curse on a unhelpful city.*

**"The kings came *and* fought,  
Then the kings of Canaan fought  
In Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo;  
They took no spoils of silver.**

**They fought from the heavens;  
The stars from their courses fought against Sisera.  
The torrent of Kishon swept them away,  
That ancient torrent, the torrent of Kishon.  
O my soul, march on in strength!  
Then the horses' hooves pounded,  
The galloping, galloping of his steeds.  
'Curse Meroz,' said the angel of the LORD,  
'Curse its inhabitants bitterly,  
Because they did not come to the help of the LORD,  
To the help of the LORD against the mighty.'"**

a. **They fought from the heavens:** The battle was fought **from the heavens** in the sense that God sent rain that made the Canaanite chariots of no use (**the torrent of Kishon swept them away**).

b. **"Curse Meroz," said the angel of the LORD:** Apparently the city of Meroz was of no help. God still accomplished His work, but the city of Meroz was cursed because they had no part in it.

4. (24-27) *Praise for Jael for her killing of Sisera.*

**"Most blessed among women is Jael,  
The wife of Heber the Kenite;  
Blessed is she among women in tents.  
He asked for water, she gave milk;  
She brought out cream in a lordly bowl.  
She stretched her hand to the tent peg,  
Her right hand to the workmen's hammer;  
She pounded Sisera, she pierced his head,  
She split and struck through his temple.  
At her feet he sank, he fell, he lay still;  
At her feet he sank, he fell;  
Where he sank, there he fell dead."**

a. **Most blessed among women is Jael:** What Jael did would be condemned by many in the days of the Judges.

The responsibility to protect and bless a guest was an almost absolute command, and Jael killed a guest. Yet she was **blessed** here because her obedience to the cause of God was greater than her obedience to tradition and custom.

b. **At her feet he sank:** Deborah wanted to increase Sisera's shame by pointing out that it was a woman who ended his life.

i. "Finally the song rejoiced over the death of the tyrant in language that thrills with Eastern imagery and color." (Morgan)

ii. "Here is a lively representation of the thing done. At the first blow or wound he was awakened, and made some attempt to rise; but being astonished and very weak, she also following her first blow with others, he found himself impotent, and fell down dead." (Poole)

*5. (28-30) Reflection on the soon disappointment of Sisera's survivors.*

**"The mother of Sisera looked through the window,  
And cried out through the lattice,  
'Why is his chariot so long in coming?  
Why tarries the clatter of his chariots?'  
Her wisest ladies answered her,  
Yes, she answered herself,  
'Are they not finding and dividing the spoil:  
To every man a girl or two;  
For Sisera, plunder of dyed garments,  
Plunder of garments embroidered and dyed,  
Two pieces of dyed embroidery for the neck of the  
looter?'"**

a. **The mother of Sisera looked through the window:** Every death has consequences and Deborah

thought of and celebrated the consequences of Sisera's death.

b. **To every man a girl or two:** Cundall on the ancient Hebrew word translated **girl**: "Elsewhere in the Old Testament it means 'womb', and in the Moabite Stone it has the meaning 'girl-slaves.' The nearest English equivalent is 'wench,' and it is clear that these unfortunate captives would be used to gratify the lusts of their captors."

i. "The Hebrew word signifieth, *vulvam vel uterum*; so they call the Israelitish damsels by way of contempt." (Trapp)

6. (31) *Final praise to God and the long-term effect of the victory.*

**"Thus let all Your enemies perish, O LORD!  
But *let* those who love Him *be* like the sun  
When it comes out in full strength."**

**So the land had rest for forty years.**

a. **Thus let all Your enemies perish:** To love God is to hate His enemies. A man or woman is defined as much by who their enemies are as by who their friends are.

b. **Let those who love Him be like the sun:** How much better it is to be one of **those who love Him** than to be one of God's **enemies**!

### **Midian Oppresses Israel**

**Jdg 6:1** Once again the people of Israel sinned against the LORD, so he let the people of Midian rule them for seven years.

Jdg 6:2 The Midianites were stronger than Israel, and the people of Israel hid from them in caves and other safe places in the hills.

Jdg 6:3 Whenever the Israelites would plant their crops, the Midianites would come with the Amalekites and the desert tribes and attack them.

Jdg 6:4 They would camp on the land and destroy the crops as far south as the area around Gaza. They would take all the sheep, cattle, and donkeys, and leave nothing for the Israelites to live on.

Jdg 6:5 They would come with their livestock and tents, as thick as locusts. They and their camels were too many to count. They came and devastated the land,

Jdg 6:6 and Israel was helpless against them.

Jdg 6:7 Then the people of Israel cried out to the LORD for help against the Midianites,

Jdg 6:8 and he sent them a prophet who brought them this message from the LORD, the God of Israel: "I brought you out of slavery in Egypt.

Jdg 6:9 I rescued you from the Egyptians and from the people who fought you here in this land. I drove them out as you advanced, and I gave you their land.

Jdg 6:10 I told you that I am the LORD your God and that you should not worship the gods of the Amorites, whose land you are now living in. But you have not listened to me."

### **The Call of Gideon**

Jdg 6:11 Then the LORD's angel came to the village of Ophrah and sat under the oak tree that belonged to Joash, a man of the clan of Abiezer. His son Gideon was threshing some wheat secretly in a wine press, so that the Midianites would not see him.

Jdg 6:12 The LORD's angel appeared to him there and said, "The LORD is with you, brave and mighty man!"

Jdg 6:13 Gideon said to him, "If I may ask, sir, why has all this happened to us if the LORD is with us? What happened



to all the wonderful things that our fathers told us the LORD used to do—how he brought them out of Egypt? The LORD has abandoned us and left us to the mercy of the Midianites."

Jdg 6:14 Then the LORD ordered him, "Go with all your great strength and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I myself am sending you."

Jdg 6:15 Gideon replied, "But Lord, how can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in the tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least important member of my family."

Jdg 6:16 The LORD answered, "You can do it because I will help you. You will crush the Midianites as easily as if they were only one man."

Jdg 6:17 Gideon replied, "If you are pleased with me, give me some proof that you are really the LORD."

Jdg 6:18 Please do not leave until I bring you an offering of food." He said, "I will stay until you come back."

Jdg 6:19 So Gideon went into his house and cooked a young goat and used a bushel of flour to make bread without any yeast. He put the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot, brought them to the LORD's angel under the oak tree, and gave them to him.

Jdg 6:20 The angel told him, "Put the meat and the bread on this rock, and pour the broth over them." Gideon did so.

Jdg 6:21 Then the LORD's angel reached out and touched the meat and the bread with the end of the stick he was holding. Fire came out of the rock and burned up the meat and the bread. Then the angel disappeared.

Jdg 6:22 Gideon then realized that it was the LORD's angel he had seen, and he said in terror, "Sovereign LORD! I have seen your angel face-to-face!"

Jdg 6:23 But the LORD told him, "Peace. Don't be afraid. You will not die."

Jdg 6:24 Gideon built an altar to the LORD there and named it "The LORD is Peace." (It is still standing at Ophrah, which belongs to the clan of Abiezer.)

Jdg 6:25 That night the LORD told Gideon, "Take your father's bull and another bull seven years old, tear down your father's altar to Baal, and cut down the symbol of the goddess Asherah, which is beside it.

Jdg 6:26 Build a well-constructed altar to the LORD your God on top of this mound. Then take the second bull and burn it whole as an offering, using for firewood the symbol of Asherah you have cut down."

Jdg 6:27 So Gideon took ten of his servants and did what the LORD had told him. He was too afraid of his family and the people in town to do it by day, so he did it at night.

### **Gideon Destroys the Altar of Baal**

Jdg 6:28 When the people in town got up early the next morning, they found that the altar to Baal and the symbol of Asherah had been cut down, and that the second bull had been burned on the altar that had been built there.

Jdg 6:29 They asked each other, "Who did this?" They investigated and found out that Gideon son of Joash had done it.

Jdg 6:30 Then they said to Joash, "Bring your son out here, so that we can kill him! He tore down the altar to Baal and cut down the symbol of Asherah beside it."

Jdg 6:31 But Joash said to all those who confronted him, "Are you arguing for Baal? Are you defending him? Anyone who argues for him will be killed before morning. If Baal is a god, let him defend himself. It is his altar that was torn down."

Jdg 6:32 From then on Gideon was known as Jerubbaal, because Joash said, "Let Baal defend himself; it is his altar that was torn down."

Jdg 6:33 Then all the Midianites, the Amalekites, and the desert tribes assembled, crossed the Jordan River, and camped in Jezreel Valley.

Jdg 6:34 The spirit of the LORD took control of Gideon, and he blew a trumpet to call the men of the clan of Abiezer to follow him.

Jdg 6:35 He sent messengers throughout the territory of both parts of Manasseh to call them to follow him. He sent messengers to the tribes of Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they also came to join him.

### **The Sign of the Fleece**

Jdg 6:36 Then Gideon said to God, "You say that you have decided to use me to rescue Israel.

Jdg 6:37 Well, I am putting some wool on the ground where we thresh the wheat. If in the morning there is dew only on the wool but not on the ground, then I will know that you are going to use me to rescue Israel."

Jdg 6:38 That is exactly what happened. When Gideon got up early the next morning, he squeezed the wool and wrung enough dew out of it to fill a bowl with water.

Jdg 6:39 Then Gideon said to God, "Don't be angry with me; let me speak just once more. Please let me make one more test with the wool. This time let the wool be dry, and the ground be wet."

Jdg 6:40 That night God did that very thing. The next morning the wool was dry, but the ground was wet with dew.

## **Judges 6:1-40**

### **Judges 6 - The Call of Gideon**

#### **A. Apostasy, servitude and supplication.**

*1. (1) Israel's apostasy brings them into servitude.*

**Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years,**

a. **Then the children of Israel did evil:** The *forty years of rest* (Jdg\_5:31) following the defeat of Sisera eventually came to an end. In their prosperity and complacency, **Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD.**

b. **So the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian:** God brought Israel into bondage through the oppression of the Midianites. This was an example of God's *grace* and *mercy* to Israel because the oppression would make them turn back to God. It would have been worse if God had just left them alone.

2. (2-6) *The details of Israel's bondage to Midian.*

**And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of the Midianites, the children of Israel made for themselves the dens, the caves, and the strongholds which are in the mountains. So it was, whenever Israel had sown, Midianites would come up; also Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them. Then they would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep nor ox nor donkey. For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, coming in as numerous as locusts; both they and their camels were without number; and they would enter the land to destroy it. So Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites, and the children of Israel cried out to the LORD.**

a. **The children of Israel made for themselves the dens, the caves, and the strongholds:** The oppression of Midian - coming because of the sin of Israel - brought Israel into *humiliation*. Before they turned back

to God they had to be *humbled*, living as cave-dwellers instead of properly civilized people.

**b. Whenever Israel had sown, Midianites would come up:** The Midianites did not continually occupy the land, but only came at the time of harvest to steal what the Israelites grew (**leave no sustenance for Israel**).

i. Israel's sin made all their hard work profitless. All their produce and livestock were stolen after they worked hard to bring it to fruition. Sin does this; it robs us of what we work hard to gain. There are many accomplished men who lose everything in life because they won't stop their sin. All is lost in order to gain what, in retrospect, seems like nothing.

ii. **As far as Gaza:** "That is, the whole *breadth* of the land, from Jordan to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Thus the whole land was ravaged and the inhabitants deprived of the necessities of life." (Clarke)

**c. Both they and their camels were without number:** The Midianites were a desert-dwelling people and they dominated Israel because of their effective use of **camels**. "It is clear that the use of this angular and imposing beast struck terror in the hearts of the Israelites." (Cundall)

**d. And the children of Israel cried out to the LORD:** After the long season of humiliation, fruitless labor, poverty, and domination by an oppressive power, Israel **finally cried out to the LORD**. Prayer was their *last resort* instead of their *first resource*.

3. (7-10) *In response to Israel's cry to the LORD, God sends a prophet.*

**And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried out to the LORD because of the Midianites, that the**

**LORD sent a prophet to the children of Israel, who said to them, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'I brought you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of bondage; and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you and gave you their land. Also I said to you, "I *am* the LORD your God; do not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell." But you have not obeyed My voice.'"**

a. **The LORD sent a prophet:** The delivering judge will appear later. Before Israel could receive and respond to the work of the judge, they first had to be prepared by this un-named prophet.

b. **I brought you up from Egypt:** God spoke through the prophet, reminding Israel of all He did for them in the past. To face their current crisis, Israel needed a reminder of what God did before.

i. This reminded them of the *love* of God. The God loving enough to before deliver from Egypt, still loved them enough to now deliver them from the Midianites.

ii. This reminded them of the *power* of God. The God powerful enough to before deliver from Egypt was still powerful enough to now deliver them from the Midianites.

c. **But you have not obeyed My voice:** God sent this messenger to tell them where the real problem was. It wasn't that the Midianites were so strong; it was that Israel was so disobedient.

i. Israel *thought* the problem was the Midianites, but the real problem was *Israel*. It is human nature to blame *others* for problems that we cause.

- ii. The message of the prophet also shows that when Israel **cried out to the LORD**, they didn't understand that *they* were the problem. Their cry to God for help did not mean that they recognized or repented of their sin.

## **B. The deliverer is called.**

### *1. (11-13) The Angel of the LORD appears to Gideon.*

**Now the Angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth tree which was in Ophrah, which *belonged* to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress, in order to hide *it* from the Midianites. And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him, and said to him, "The LORD *is* with you, you mighty man of valor!" Gideon said to Him, "O my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where *are* all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites."**

a. **The Angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth tree:** When **the Angel of the LORD** appeared to Gideon, we recognize this is as a *theophany* - an Old Testament appearance of Jesus Christ, in human, bodily form, but before His incarnation in Bethlehem.

- i. The description of the encounter with the **Angel of the LORD** shows that this is not merely an angel speaking on behalf of God. It shows that God himself, appearing in human form, spoke to Gideon:

- *Then the LORD turned to him and said (Jdg 6:14).*
- *And the LORD said to him (Jdg 6:16).*

- ii. Since no man has seen God the Father at any time (Joh 1:18, Joh 5:27) and by nature the Holy Spirit is

a spirit without bodily form, it is reasonable to see this as an appearance of the *Second Person* of the Trinity, as an appearance of *God the Son*. However, this is not the *incarnation* in the same sense that Jesus was as a baby in Bethlehem. At Bethlehem Jesus was *truly* and *fully* human (while also being truly and fully God). Here, it is more likely that Jesus took the *mere appearance* of humanity, doing so for a specific purpose.

b. **Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress:** This was both difficult and humiliating. Wheat was **threshed** in open spaces, typically on a hill-top so the breeze could blow away the chaff. Wheat was not normally **threshed** in a sunken place like a **winepress**.

i. "This was a place of privacy; he could not make a threshing-floor in open day as the custom was, and bring either the wheel over the grain, or tread it out with the feet of the oxen, for fear of the Midianites, who were accustomed to come and take it away as soon as threshed." (Clarke)

ii. "So God called Moses and David from following the ewes, Elisha from the plough-tail, the apostles from fishing, washing, and mending their nets. He usually appeared to the busy in visions, like as Satan doth to the idle in manifold temptations." (Trapp)

c. **The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor:** This was a strange greeting to Gideon. It didn't seem like the LORD was **with** him and it didn't seem that he was a **mighty man of valor**. Gideon might have turned to see if there was another person to whom the angel spoke.

i. "Wherein did that valor consist? Apparently, he was a simple man living a very ordinary life. The Angel found him about his daily duty." (Morgan)



d. **Where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about:** Gideon *heard* about the great works of God in the past, yet he wondered why he did not see the same great works in his day. Gideon thought the problem was with God (**now the LORD has forsaken us**) - not with him and with the nation of Israel as a whole. In truth, Israel forsook God - God did not forsake Israel.

i. Yet to his credit, it *bothered* Gideon that Israel was in this condition. He was far from apathetic or fatalistic. "He is revealed as a man continuing his work with the bitterness of the whole situation burning like a fire in his bones." (Morgan)

2. (14-16) *Gideon's call to God's service.*

**Then the LORD turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?" So he said to Him, "O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan *is* the weakest in Manasseh, and I *am* the least in my father's house." And the LORD said to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man."**

a. **Go in this might of yours:** It is hard to see that Gideon had *anymight* to go in. Yet the Angel of the LORD didn't mock Gideon when he told him, "**Go in this might of yours.**" Gideon indeed had **might**, but not as we might normally think.

- Gideon had the **might** of the *humble*, threshing wheat on the winepress floor.
- Gideon had the **might** of the *caring* because he cared about the low place of Israel.
- Gideon had the **might** of *knowledge*, because he knew God did great things in the past.

- Gideon had the **might** of the *spiritually hungry* because he wanted to see God do great works again.
- Gideon had the **might** of the *teachable* because he listened to what the Angel of the LORD said.
- Gideon had the **might** of the *weak*, and God's strength is perfected in weakness (2Co 12:9).

b. **O my Lord, how can I save Israel:** Gideon had might to go forth in, but he could not see himself as someone who could do great things for God. He thought of himself as insignificant, from the smallest clan in his tribe, and that he was the least in his own family.

i. At the same time, Gideon was correct: *he* could not **save Israel**. But a great God could use a small and weak Gideon to rescue Israel.

c. **Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man:** God's assurance to Gideon was not to build up his self confidence, but to assure him that God was indeed with him. Gideon did not need more *self*-confidence, he needed more *God*-confidence.

i. It is important to know that God has sent us but it is even greater to know that He is **with** us. This was the same assurance God gave to Moses (Exo 3:12) and that Jesus gave all believers (Mat 28:20).

3. (17-21) *A sign from the Angel of the LORD.*

**Then he said to Him, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who talk with me. Do not depart from here, I pray, until I come to You and bring out my offering and set *it* before You." And He said, "I will wait until you come back." So Gideon went in and prepared a young goat, and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour. The meat he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot; and he brought *them* out to Him under the terebinth**

tree and presented *them* . The Angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay *them* on this rock, and pour out the broth." And he did so. Then the Angel of the LORD put out the end of the staff that *was* in His hand, and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire rose out of the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. And the Angel of the LORD departed out of his sight.

a. **Then show me a sign that it is You who talk with me:** It was not wrong for Gideon to ask for a confirming sign. It made sense to ask God to confirm some area of direction that was not specifically detailed in His word, and in regard to something as life-or-death as leading Israel into battle against an enemy.

i. For example, we don't need a special sign that God loves us because He forever demonstrated His love at the cross according to Rom 5:8. This is true for many other things specifically detailed in God's Word. Yet when it comes to guidance in things not specifically detailed in God's Word, it is possible to look for and expect confirmation in various ways.

b. **Fire rose out of the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread:** The miraculous sign alone should not have persuaded Gideon because there are miraculous deceptions. Yet this miracle of fire *together* with the other aspects of this whole experience should have persuaded Gideon that this all was from the LORD.

i. "Here was a sign that the Midianites should be destroyed without man's labour." (Trapp)

4. (22-24) *Gideon reacts with awe and worship to the miraculous sign.*

**Now Gideon perceived that He was the Angel of the LORD. So Gideon said, "Alas, O Lord GOD! For I have seen the Angel of the LORD face to face." Then the LORD said to him, "Peace *be* with you; do not fear, you shall not die." So Gideon built an altar there to the LORD, and called it The-LORD-Is- Peace. To this day it *is* still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.**

**a. Now Gideon perceived that He was the Angel of the LORD:** This demonstrates that before this, Gideon believed that this person was simply a man. The appearance of **the Angel of the LORD** was completely human in its character.

**b. Peace be with you; do not fear, you shall not die:** Once Gideon realized the identity of the **Angel of the LORD**, he was terrified. The **Angel of the LORD** brought this comforting word to the terrified Gideon.

i. "Why was Gideon afraid? Not because he was a coward-you will scarcely meet with a braver man in all Scripture than this son of Joash-but because even brave men are alarmed at the supernatural. He saw something which he had never seen before, an appearance celestial, mysterious, above what is usually seen of mortal men; therefore, as he feared God, Gideon was afraid." (Spurgeon)

**c. So Gideon built an altar there to the LORD:** Gideon did this as an act of worship and consecration unto the LORD, whom he had just encountered face-to-face. He was no longer terrified of God, as demonstrated by the title given to the altar: **The-LORD-Is-Peace.**

i. "When Gideon is fully at peace, what does he begin to do for God? If God loves you he will use you either for suffering or service; and if he has given you peace you must now prepare for war. Will you think me odd

if I say that our Lord came to give us peace that he might send us out to war?" (Spurgeon)

### **C. The beginning of Gideon's ministry.**

#### *1. (25-27) Removing Baal worship from his midst.*

**Now it came to pass the same night that the LORD said to him, "Take your father's young bull, the second bull of seven years old, and tear down the altar of Baal that your father has, and cut down the wooden image that *is* beside it; and build an altar to the LORD your God on top of this rock in the proper arrangement, and take the second bull and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the image which you shall cut down." So Gideon took ten men from among his servants and did as the LORD had said to him. But because he feared his father's household and the men of the city too much to do *it* by day, he did *it* by night.**

a. **The same night that the Lord said to him:** This happened right away. When Gideon made himself responsive to God, God guided him. Perhaps it happened as soon as Gideon built the altar; with the altar built, now God commanded him to sacrifice something on it.

b. **Tear down the altar of Baal that your father has:** In Gideon's community, Baal was worshipped right along side of Yahweh. God called Gideon to get his own house in order first.

i. It seems that two bulls were to be offered; one as a sin offering, and the other as a consecration offering. "It appears that the second bullock was offered, because it was just *seven* years old, Jdg 6:25, being calved about the time that the Midianitish oppression began; and it was now to be slain to indicate that their slavery should end with its life." (Clarke)

c. **He did it by night:** Gideon probably did this at night and under the cover of secrecy because he **feared** that his **father's household and the men of the city** would *prevent* him from doing what needed to be done.

2. (28-32) *The removal of an altar raises a controversy.*

**And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, there was the altar of Baal, torn down; and the wooden image that was beside it was cut down, and the second bull was being offered on the altar which had been built. So they said to one another, "Who has done this thing?" And when they had inquired and asked, they said, "Gideon the son of Joash has done this thing." Then the men of the city said to Joash, "Bring out your son, that he may die, because he has torn down the altar of Baal, and because he has cut down the wooden image that was beside it." But Joash said to all who stood against him, "Would you plead for Baal? Would you save him? Let the one who would plead for him be put to death by morning! If he *is* a god, let him plead for himself, because his altar has been torn down!" Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, "Let Baal plead against him, because he has torn down his altar."**

a. **Gideon the son of Joash has done this thing:** They didn't have a hard time figuring out who was responsible for the destruction of the altar. Gideon was found out immediately. What he did could not be hidden.

b. **Bring out your son, that he may die, because he has torn down the altar of Baal:** This shows just how powerful Baal worship was in Israel at this time. "The heresy had become the main religion." (Wolf)

i. Ancient Israel worshipped Baal because he was thought to be the god of weather, and they relied on

the weather for agricultural prosperity. In the difficult economic times because of the Midianite oppression, people worshipped Baal all the more, not understanding that they only made things worse by not turning to God.

ii. "They all felt an interest in the continuance of rites in which they had often many sensual gratifications. Baal and Ashtaroth would have more worshippers than the true God, because their *rites* were more adapted to the fallen nature of man." (Clarke)

c. **If he is a god, let him plead for himself, because his altar has been torn down:** Gideon's father made a very logical argument for preserving his son's life. Since Baal was the offended party, he could defend himself.

i. This is similar to what happened during a great move of God in the South Seas in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. One tribal chief was converted to Christianity and he gathered up all the idols of his people. He told the idols he was going to destroy them, and then he gave them the chance to run away. He destroyed all the ones that sat there like dumb statues.

ii. This incident gave Gideon the nickname **Jerubbaal**. The name means, "A man against whom Baal is to strive and contend; a title of honour." (Trapp)

*3. (33-35) Gideon gathers an army.*

**Then all the Midianites and Amalekites, the people of the East, gathered together; and they crossed over and encamped in the Valley of Jezreel. But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon; then he blew the trumpet, and the Abiezrites gathered behind him. And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, who also gathered behind him. He also sent messengers to**

**Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali; and they came up to meet them.**

a. **The Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon:** This follows the familiar pattern of the Spirit's work upon men under the Old Covenant. The Holy Spirit comes upon specific people for specific reasons, usually for divinely empowered leadership. Under the New Covenant, a broad and generous outpouring of the Holy Spirit is promised upon all flesh (Joe 2:28-29, Act 2:17-18).

b. **Then he blew the trumpet:** Because of this divine empowering, Gideon was able to gather an impressive number of troops on short notice. Jdg 7:3 tells us that 32,000 men came to follow him into battle.

4. (36-40) *God assures Gideon's doubts.*

**So Gideon said to God, "If You will save Israel by my hand as You have said; look, I shall put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece only, and *it is* dry on all the ground, then I shall know that You will save Israel by my hand, as You have said." And it was so. When he rose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece together, he wrung the dew out of the fleece, a bowlful of water. Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me, but let me speak just once more: Let me test, I pray, just once more with the fleece; let it now be dry only on the fleece, but on all the ground let there be dew." And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, but there was dew on all the ground.**

a. **If You will save Israel by my hand as You have said:** God already gave Gideon a sign (Jdg 6:17-21). Here, Gideon asked God to do *a second* miracle to confirm His word – and then *a third* miracle to confirm it again.



i. Sometimes Christians talk about putting out a “fleece” before the LORD. This phrase refers back to what Gideon did here. He used a literal **fleece** in asking God to confirm His Word with a sign.

ii. Adam Clarke described how the early church commentator Origen, who was given to allegorizing, found the “deeper” meaning of this account:

- The fleece represents the Jewish people and the area around it represents the Gentiles.
- The fleece was covered with dew while all around was dry, representing the Jewish nation favored with the law and the prophets.
- The fleece was then dry and all around was wet with dew, representing that the Jewish nation was cast off for rejecting the Gospel and the Gospel was preached to the Gentiles and they converted to God.
- The dew wrung out into the bowl represents the doctrines of Christianity, which are extracted from the Jewish writings. This is also shadowed forth by Christ’s pouring water into a basin and washing the disciple’s feet.

**b. Then I shall know that You will save Israel by my hand, as You have said:** Gideon showed that he had a weak, imperfect faith. For such a bold, life-endangering mission, one might understand (and encourage) his request for one sign (fulfilled in Jdg 6:17-21). But asking for second and third signs showed that his faith was weak.

i. The test was wrong because it was essentially a trick, and it had nothing to do with fighting the Midianites. Gideon probably didn’t understand that he was actually dictating his terms to God. Sometimes God shows His displeasure with such requests. In

Luk 1:18, when Zechariah, John the Baptist's father, asked for a confirming sign, the LORD made him mute until the birth of his son.

ii. Gideon also did not keep his word. God fulfilled the sign once, and Gideon said that would be enough for him. But he went back on his word after God fulfilled the first sign. Yet the LORD was still merciful and gracious to Gideon. "This is an outstanding example of God's gracious patience with a troubled child." (Wood)

iii. Yet before being too critical of Gideon, we should consider the challenge that was ahead of him. Many of us would immediately refuse such a call, without even considering allowing God to confirm it. Gideon's weak faith was still greater than *no* faith. For this reason, Gideon is rightly included in the register of great men and women of faith (Heb 11:32).

### **Gideon's Three Hundred Men**

**Jdg 7:1** One day Gideon and all his men got up early and camped beside Harod Spring. The Midianite camp was in the valley to the north of them by Moreh Hill.

Jdg 7:2 The LORD said to Gideon, "The men you have are too many for me to give them victory over the Midianites. They might think that they had won by themselves, and so give me no credit.

Jdg 7:3 Announce to the people, 'Anyone who is afraid should go back home, and we will stay here at Mount Gilead.' " So twenty-two thousand went back, but ten thousand stayed.

Jdg 7:4 Then the LORD said to Gideon, "You still have too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will separate them for you there. If I tell you a man should go with you, he will go. If I tell you a man should not go with you, he will not go."

Jdg 7:5 Gideon took the men down to the water, and the LORD told him, "Separate everyone who laps up the water with his tongue like a dog, from everyone who gets down on his knees to drink."

Jdg 7:6 There were three hundred men who scooped up water in their hands and lapped it; all the others got down on their knees to drink.

Jdg 7:7 The LORD said to Gideon, "I will rescue you and give you victory over the Midianites with the three hundred men who lapped the water. Tell everyone else to go home."

Jdg 7:8 So Gideon sent all the Israelites home, except the three hundred, who kept all the supplies and trumpets. The Midianite camp was below them in the valley.

Jdg 7:9 That night the LORD commanded Gideon, "Get up and attack the camp; I am giving you victory over it."

Jdg 7:10 But if you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah.

Jdg 7:11 You will hear what they are saying, and then you will have the courage to attack." So Gideon and his servant Purah went down to the edge of the enemy camp.

Jdg 7:12 The Midianites, the Amalekites, and the desert tribesmen were spread out in the valley like a swarm of locusts, and they had as many camels as there are grains of sand on the seashore.

Jdg 7:13 When Gideon arrived, he heard a man telling a friend about a dream. He was saying, "I dreamed that a loaf of barley bread rolled into our camp and hit a tent. The tent collapsed and lay flat on the ground."

Jdg 7:14 His friend replied, "It's the sword of the Israelite, Gideon son of Joash! It can't mean anything else! God has given him victory over Midian and our whole army!"

Jdg 7:15 When Gideon heard about the man's dream and what it meant, he fell to his knees and worshiped the LORD.

Then he went back to the Israelite camp and said, "Get up! The LORD is giving you victory over the Midianite army!"

Jdg 7:16 He divided his three hundred men into three groups and gave each man a trumpet and a jar with a torch inside it.

Jdg 7:17 He told them, "When I get to the edge of the camp, watch me, and do what I do.

Jdg 7:18 When my group and I blow our trumpets, then you blow yours all around the camp and shout, 'For the LORD and for Gideon!' "

### **Gideon Defeats Midian**

Jdg 7:19 Gideon and his one hundred men came to the edge of the camp a while before midnight, just after the guard had been changed. Then they blew the trumpets and broke the jars they were holding,

Jdg 7:20 and the other two groups did the same. They all held the torches in their left hands, the trumpets in their right, and shouted, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!"

Jdg 7:21 Every man stood in his place around the camp, and the whole enemy army ran away yelling.

Jdg 7:22 While Gideon's men were blowing their trumpets, the LORD made the enemy troops attack each other with their swords. They ran toward Zarethan as far as Beth Shittah, as far as the town of Abel Meholah near Tabbath.

Jdg 7:23 Then men from the tribes of Naphtali, Asher, and both parts of Manasseh were called out, and they pursued the Midianites.

Jdg 7:24 Gideon sent messengers through all the hill country of Ephraim to say, "Come down and fight the Midianites. Hold the Jordan River and the streams as far as Bethbarah, to keep the Midianites from crossing them." The men of Ephraim were called together, and they held the Jordan River and the streams as far as Bethbarah.

Jdg 7:25 They captured the two Midianite chiefs, Oreb and Zeeb; they killed Oreb at Oreb Rock, and Zeeb at the Winepress of Zeeb. They continued to pursue the Midianites and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon, who was now east of the Jordan.

## **Judges 7:1-25**

### **Judges 7 - The Battle Against Midian**

#### **A. Israel's small army is too big for God to use.**

*1. (1-3) God tells Gideon to tell all his soldiers who are afraid to go home.*

**Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped beside the well of Harod, so that the camp of the Midianites was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley. And the LORD said to Gideon, "The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.'" Now therefore, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, 'Whoever is fearful and afraid, let him turn and depart at once from Mount Gilead.'" And twenty-two thousand of the people returned, and ten thousand remained.**

**a. The people who are with you are too many for Me:** This was a great test of Gideon's faith. His army of 32,000 men was already overmatched by 135,000 Midianites. Yet God thought his army was *too big*, and He commanded Gideon to invite all who were afraid to go home. He was left with only 10,000 men.

i. Gideon was probably surprised at the number of men who were afraid to fight and hoped that only a few hundred would leave. But we are told that they

assembled in a place where they could see the 135,000 Midianite troops (Jdg 7:8). The sight of a huge opposing army made many Israelite soldiers afraid.

b. **Lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying "My own hand has saved me"**: This explains *why* the army of 32,000 was too large. Israel could still take credit for a victory if they had 32,000 troops. They could believe they were underdogs who triumphed through their own great bravery or strategy. God wanted the odds so bad that the victory would clearly be His alone.

i. If we really believe the principle, *not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of hosts (Zec 4:6)*, then our smallness does not matter. If we really believe the principle, *some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the LORD our God (Psa 20:7)*, then smallness does not matter.

2. (4-8) *Gideon must separate the men according to a particular test.*

**But the LORD said to Gideon, "The people are still *too* many; bring them down to the water, and I will test them for you there. Then it will be, *that* of whom I say to you, 'This one shall go with you,' the same shall go with you; and of whomever I say to you, 'This one shall not go with you,' the same shall not go." So he brought the people down to the water. And the LORD said to Gideon, "Everyone who laps from the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set apart by himself; likewise everyone who gets down on his knees to drink." And the number of those who lapped, *putting* their hand to their mouth, was three hundred men; but all the rest of the people got down**

on their knees to drink water. Then the LORD said to Gideon, "By the three hundred men who lapped I will save you, and deliver the Midianites into your hand. Let all the *other* people go, every man to his place." So the people took provisions and their trumpets in their hands. And he sent away all *the rest of* Israel, every man to his tent, and retained those three hundred men. Now the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.

a. **The people are still too many:** God already reduced Gideon's army from 32,000 to 10,000. Here He reduced it from 10,000 to 300. He did this because 10,000 were **still too many** for God's purpose.

i. We rarely think that bigness can be a hindrance to the work of God. Yet it is harder to truly rely on God when we have many wonderful resources at hand. Though it certainly can be done, it is hard to be big and to rely only on the *LORD*. When we are big, it is possible to do a lot in human resources and "give the credit" to God.

ii. Paul was in danger of being too strong for his own good. Therefore, God brought a weakness into his life so that Paul would keep relying on the *LORD's* strength - and be stronger than ever (2Co 12:7-10).

b. **Bring them down to the water, and I will test them for you there:** This seems a strange test, and there are different ideas as to why God used this to separate the soldiers. Perhaps it was because those who cupped the water in their hands and brought it to their mouth were better soldiers because they kept their eyes on their surroundings even when taking a drink.

i. **As a dog laps:** The ancient Hebrew word for **laps** is *yalok*, used to imitate the sound a dog makes when lapping water.

ii. "The test was peculiarly military. Men in such a position were not on guard against sudden surprise." (Morgan)

iii. We might say that God eliminated the fearful and those who thought first only of convenience, the easy way. "The thought is disturbing, but it may well be true, that the composition of God's army to fight Satan's hosts in any day is really little different. How many Christians are so fearful of the enemy that they are of no real use in this warfare, and how many of the remainder are so self-centered, rather than God centered, that they find little place for effective ministry." (Wood)

**c. By the three hundred men who lapped I will save you, and deliver the Midianites into your hand:** God assured Gideon that victory was certain, even through only 300 men. Now the Israeli army was less than 1% of its original size and the proportion was 400 Midianite soldiers to each Israeli soldier. Gideon could only trust in God because there was nothing else to trust.

*3. (9-11) Gideon must spy on the camp of the Midianites and find encouragement.*

**It happened on the same night that the LORD said to him, "Arise, go down against the camp, for I have delivered it into your hand. But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant, and you shall hear what they say; and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp." Then he went down with Purah his servant to the outpost of the armed men who were in the camp.**

**a. Arise, go down against the camp:** God wanted Gideon to find encouragement in this visit to the enemy's camp. This shows that when God asks us to do hard things for Him, He doesn't fold His arms and sit back and



expect us to do it on our own. He is there to guide us and to keep us and to encourage us all along the way.

b. **Afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp:** This is the tender mercy of God. He dealt with the doubts and fears of Gideon, and wanted to assure him.

4. (12-15) *God reassures Gideon through the Midianites.*

**Now the Midianites and Amalekites, all the people of the East, were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the seashore in multitude. And when Gideon had come, there was a man telling a dream to his companion. He said, "I have had a dream: *To my surprise*, a loaf of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian; it came to a tent and struck it so that it fell and overturned, and the tent collapsed." Then his companion answered and said, "This *is* nothing else but the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel! Into his hand God has delivered Midian and the whole camp." And so it was, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, that he worshiped. He returned to the camp of Israel, and said, "Arise, for the LORD has delivered the camp of Midian into your hand."**

a. **A loaf of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian:** Only the very poor ate **barley bread**. The vision meant that the camp of the Midianites would be knocked over by a humble nobody.

i. "Barley-meal was rather food for dogs or cattle than for men; and therefore the barley cake would be the emblem of a thing despised." (Spurgeon)

ii. "A cake of barley bread might be a worthless thing; but if God were behind it, it would upset a tent!"

(Meyer)

**b. This is nothing else but the sword of Gideon:** God allowed Gideon to see a great confirmation of His future work. This was obviously no coincidence and no display of luck. God used this situation to build the faith of Gideon, and it worked so well that all Gideon could do was worship God.

i. It was no accident that the man dreamed the dream that night; no accident that he told his friend about it at just that moment; no accident that Gideon came to the exact place where he overheard the man telling the dream.

ii. "I think if I had been Gideon I should have said to myself, 'I do not so much rejoice in what this dreamer saith as I do in the fact that he has told his dream at the moment when I was lurking near him: I see the hand of the Lord in this, and I am strengthened by the sight. Verily, I perceive that the Lord worketh all things with unfailing wisdom, and faileth not in his designs. He that has ordered this matter can order all things else.'" (Spurgeon)

iii. It must have built the faith of Gideon to know that his enemies were afraid of *him*. When we are weak in faith we often make our enemies stronger than they really are. We could say that the devil himself is afraid of the normal Christian - or at least afraid of what they *could* become.

iv. We should take it to heart; our enemies, both human and spiritual, are at their core *afraid of us*. "Behold the host of doubters, and heretics, and revilers, who, at the present time, have come up into the inheritance of Israel, hungry from their deserts of rationalism and atheism! They are eating up all the corn of the land. They cast a doubt upon all the

verities of our faith. But we need not fear them; for if we heard their secret counsels, we should perceive that they are afraid of us. Their loud blusterings and their constant sneers, are the index of real fear. Those who preach the cross of our Lord Jesus are the terror of modern thinkers. In their heart of hearts they dread the preaching of the old-fashioned gospel, and they hate what they dread. On their beds they dream of the coming of some evangelist into their neighborhood. What the name of Richard was to the Saracens, that is the name of Moody to these boastful intellects.” (Spurgeon)

**c. Arise, for the LORD has delivered the camp of Midian into your hand:** Gideon’s encouragement was contagious. Having received encouragement, he could not help but spread that encouragement to others and his encouragement built their faith.

i. “But what a pity it is that we should need such little bits of things to cheer us up, when we have matters of far surer import to make us glad! Gideon had already received, by God’s own angel, the word, ‘Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.’ Was not this enough for him? Whence is it that a boy’s dream comforts him more than God’s own word.” (Spurgeon)

**B. The army is small enough to be used by God to win the battle.**

*1. (16-18) Gideon announces a strange battle plan.*

**Then he divided the three hundred men *into* three companies, and he put a trumpet into every man’s hand, with empty pitchers, and torches inside the pitchers. And he said to them, “Look at me and do likewise; watch, and when I come to the edge of the camp you shall do as I do: When I blow the trumpet,**

**I and all who *are* with me, then you also blow the trumpets on every side of the whole camp, and say, 'The sword of the LORD and of Gideon!'"**

a. **He divided the three hundred men into three companies:** There is no specific mention that God gave Gideon this plan through supernatural revelation. Yet, because Gideon was a Spirit-filled man (Jdg 6:34), the supernatural can operate very naturally in his life.

b. **Look at me and do likewise:** This plan probably came very naturally to Gideon, but upon reflection one can clearly see how the Holy Spirit prompted him.

*2. (19-23) God strikes the army of Midian with a surprise attack.*

**So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outpost of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just as they had posted the watch; and they blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers that were in their hands. Then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers; they held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands for blowing; and they cried, "The sword of the LORD and of Gideon!" And every man stood in his place all around the camp; and the whole army ran and cried out and fled. When the three hundred blew the trumpets, the LORD set every man's sword against his companion throughout the whole camp; and the army fled to Beth Acacia, toward Zererah, as far as the border of Abel Meholah, by Tabbath. And the men of Israel gathered together from Naphtali, Asher, and all Manasseh, and pursued the Midianites.**

a. **Then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers:** The Midianite soldiers awoke to an explosion of noise, light, and movement coming down on

them from all directions. No wonder they thought they were being attacked by an army even bigger than they were.

**b. And they cried, "The sword of the LORD and of Gideon":** This cry was not the result of pride on Gideon's part. Instead, it showed wisdom in the attack because clearly the Midianites were already afraid of **the sword of Gideon** (Jdg 7:14), and shouting helped to send them into panic.

i. Perhaps the Midianites did not know who the LORD was, but they knew there was a man from the LORD named Gideon. It was appropriate for Gideon to take this leadership role.

**c. The LORD set every man's sword against his companion throughout the whole camp:** The first phase of the battle wasn't between Israel and Midian, but as the Midianites fought themselves. This is a good example of how we can be *more than conquerors through Him who loved us* (Rom 8:37). We get the spoils of victory though Jesus won the battle for us.

i. The early Christian writer Origen often emphasized elaborate spiritual meanings to Biblical accounts. In this story he made the 300 men types of preachers of the gospel. Their trumpets were a picture of preaching Christ crucified. Their torchlights represented the holy conduct of the preachers.

ii. **And the men of Israel gathered together from Naphtali, Asher, and all Manasseh, and pursued the Midianites:** "If some have the courage to strike the enemy, there are others who will come out of their hiding-places to hunt the beaten foe. When you really want help, often you cannot get it; but when you can afford to do without assistance, you will sometimes be embarrassed by it." (Spurgeon)

### *3. (24-25) Working towards total defeat of Midian.*

**Then Gideon sent messengers throughout all the mountains of Ephraim, saying, "Come down against the Midianites, and seize from them the watering places as far as Beth Barah and the Jordan." Then all the men of Ephraim gathered together and seized the watering places as far as Beth Barah and the Jordan. And they captured two princes of the Midianites, Oreb and Zeeb. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb they killed at the winepress of Zeeb. They pursued Midian and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon on the other side of the Jordan.**

a. **Come down against the Midianites:** This was *not* unbelief on Gideon's part. Though God started the work with a small number of soldiers, once the work began, Gideon wanted many to get involved in the work.

b. **They pursued Midian:** God blessed the effort of people of Ephraim, and they made good success against the enemy and their leaders.

### **Gideon Defeats Zebah and Zalmunna**

**Jdg 8:1** Then the people of Ephraim said to Gideon, "Why didn't you call us when you went to fight the Midianites? Why did you treat us like this?" They complained bitterly about it.

Jdg 8:2 But he told them, "What I was able to do is nothing compared with what you have done. Even the little that you people of Ephraim did is worth more than what my whole clan has done.

Jdg 8:3 After all, through the power of God you killed the two Midianite chiefs, Oreb and Zeeb. What have I done to compare with that?" When he said this, they were no longer so angry.

Jdg 8:4 By this time Gideon and his three hundred men had come to the Jordan River and had crossed it. They were exhausted, but were still pursuing the enemy.

Jdg 8:5 When they arrived at Sukkoth, he said to the men of the town, "Please give my men some loaves of bread. They are exhausted, and I am chasing Zebah and Zalmunna, the Midianite kings."

Jdg 8:6 But the leaders of Sukkoth said, "Why should we give your army any food? You haven't captured Zebah and Zalmunna yet."

Jdg 8:7 So Gideon said, "All right! When the LORD has handed Zebah and Zalmunna over to me, I will beat you with thorns and briers from the desert!"

Jdg 8:8 Gideon went on to Penuel and made the same request of the people there, but the men of Penuel gave the same answer as the men of Sukkoth.

Jdg 8:9 So he said to them, "I am going to come back safe and sound, and when I do, I will tear this tower down!"

Jdg 8:10 Zebah and Zalmunna were at Karkor with their army. Of the whole army of desert tribesmen, only about 15,000 were left; 120,000 soldiers had been killed.

Jdg 8:11 Gideon went on the road along the edge of the desert, east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and attacked the army by surprise.

Jdg 8:12 The two Midianite kings, Zebah and Zalmunna, ran away, but he pursued them and captured them, and caused their whole army to panic.

Jdg 8:13 When Gideon was returning from the battle by way of Heres Pass,

Jdg 8:14 he captured a young man from Sukkoth and questioned him. The young man wrote down for Gideon the names of the seventy-seven leading men of Sukkoth.

Jdg 8:15 Then Gideon went to the men of Sukkoth and said, "Remember when you refused to help me? You said

that you couldn't give any food to my exhausted army because I hadn't captured Zebah and Zalmunna yet. Well, here they are!"

Jdg 8:16 He then took thorns and briers from the desert and used them to punish the leaders of Sukkoth.

Jdg 8:17 He also tore down the tower at Penuel and killed the men of that city.

Jdg 8:18 Then Gideon asked Zebah and Zalmunna, "What about the men you killed at Tabor?" They answered, "They looked like you—every one of them like the son of a king."

Jdg 8:19 Gideon said, "They were my brothers, my own mother's sons. I solemnly swear that if you had not killed them, I would not kill you."

Jdg 8:20 Then he said to Jether, his oldest son, "Go ahead, kill them!" But the boy did not draw his sword. He hesitated, because he was still only a boy.

Jdg 8:21 Then Zebah and Zalmunna said to Gideon, "Come on, kill us yourself. It takes a man to do a man's job." So Gideon killed them and took the ornaments that were on the necks of their camels.

### **Gideon's Ephod**

Jdg 8:22 After that, the Israelites said to Gideon, "Be our ruler—you and your descendants after you. You have saved us from the Midianites."

Jdg 8:23 Gideon answered, "I will not be your ruler, nor will my son. The LORD will be your ruler."

Jdg 8:24 But he went on to say, "Let me ask one thing of you. Every one of you give me the earrings you took." (The Midianites, like other desert people, wore gold earrings.)

Jdg 8:25 The people answered, "We'll be glad to give them to you." They spread out a cloth, and everyone put on it the earrings that he had taken.



Jdg 8:26 The gold earrings that Gideon got weighed over forty pounds, and this did not include the ornaments, necklaces, and purple clothes that the kings of Midian wore, nor the collars that were around the necks of their camels.

Jdg 8:27 Gideon made an idol from the gold and put it in his hometown, Ophrah. All the Israelites abandoned God and went there to worship the idol. It was a trap for Gideon and his family.

Jdg 8:28 So Midian was defeated by the Israelites and was no longer a threat. The land was at peace for forty years, until Gideon died.

### **The Death of Gideon**

Jdg 8:29 Gideon went back to his own home and lived there.

Jdg 8:30 He had seventy sons, because he had many wives.

Jdg 8:31 He also had a concubine in Shechem; she bore him a son, and he named him Abimelech.

Jdg 8:32 Gideon son of Joash died at a ripe old age and was buried in the tomb of his father Joash, at Ophrah, the town of the clan of Abiezer.

Jdg 8:33 After Gideon's death the people of Israel were unfaithful to God again and worshiped the Baals. They made Baal-of-the-Covenant their god,

Jdg 8:34 and no longer served the LORD their God, who had saved them from all their enemies around them.

Jdg 8:35 They were not grateful to the family of Gideon for all the good that he had done for Israel.

## **Judges 8:1-35**

### **Judges 8 - Pursuing After Midian**

**A. Gideon battles Midianite kings and contentious Israelites.**

1. (1-3) *Ephraim's complaint and Gideon's answer.*

**Now the men of Ephraim said to him, "Why have you done this to us by not calling us when you went to fight with the Midianites?" And they reprimanded him sharply. So he said to them, "What have I done now in comparison with you? *Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer?* God has delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. And what was I able to do in comparison with you?" Then their anger toward him subsided when he said that.**

a. **And they reprimanded him sharply:** The **men of Ephraim** joined in the fight against Midian when Gideon called out to them (Jdg 7:24-25). Yet they were upset that Gideon did not call them *before* the battle started. Gideon's initial call for help went out to the tribes of Manasseh (his own tribe), Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali (Jdg 6:35).

i. The **men of Ephraim** seem to have cared more about recognition than the overall good of Israel. Instead of being jealous about the recognition that others received, they should have been happy that God's people were rescued and that they had some part in the victory. Jealousy often hinders the work of God.

b. **What have I done now in comparison with you:** Gideon did not challenge their pride; instead he soothed their pride by complimenting them and giving them the recognition they seemed to crave. Most importantly, he challenged them to get involved in the work of God that was at hand. His reply was a wise way to deal with contention when there is work for the LORD to be done.

i. Yet, Gideon seems to have had a continuing controversy with the men of Ephraim. His later

making of an ephod (Jdg 8:27) was a disservice to Israel and may have been prompted by a competitive attitude towards Ephraim.

*2. (4-9) The sins of Succoth and Penuel.*

**When Gideon came to the Jordan, he and the three hundred men who were with him crossed over, exhausted but still in pursuit. Then he said to the men of Succoth, "Please give loaves of bread to the people who follow me, for they are exhausted, and I am pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, kings of Midian." And the leaders of Succoth said, "Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in your hand, that we should give bread to your army?" So Gideon said, "For this cause, when the LORD has delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, then I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers!" Then he went up from there to Penuel and spoke to them in the same way. And the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered. So he also spoke to the men of Penuel, saying, "When I come back in peace, I will tear down this tower!"**

**a. He and the three hundred men who were with him crossed over, exhausted but still in pursuit:** We can imagine how tired they were. They fought hard and pursued the enemy over a long distance.

i. "If you, dear brethren and sisters, will give yourselves wholly to God's work, although you will never get tired of it, you will often get tired in it. If a man has never tired himself with working for God, I should think he never has done any work that was worth doing." (Spurgeon)

ii. "Let us also serve the Lord when every movement is painful, when even to think is wearisome. These men were faint. You know what it is for a soldier to be

faint; it is no nonsense, no presence, it is real fainting. Yet to go running on when you are ready to faint, to keep right on when you are ready to drop, this is very trying work; yet let us do it, brethren, by God's grace. Some people only pray when they feel like praying; but we need most to pray when we feel that we cannot pray. If we were only to preach, - some of us, - when we felt like preaching, we should not often preach." (Spurgeon)

**b. Please give loaves of bread to the people who follow me:** Through Gideon, the call came to the people of the city of Succoth to support those who fought the battle. They were not asked to engage in the actual battle, but simply to support those on the front lines.

**c. Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in your hand, that we should give bread to your army:** Instead of help, the people of Succoth and Penuel had an excuse. They didn't want to support Israel in the fight against Midian until the battle was already won.

i. We can suppose that this was discouraging for Gideon and those fighting the battle. They didn't ask the people of Succoth and Penuel to fight on the front lines, only to support those who did. Yet they were unwilling and made excuses. When we set out to do the LORD's work, often the resistance we face is from our friends. We can't allow this to hinder or discourage our work.

**d. When the LORD has delivered...When I come back in peace, I will tear down this tower:** With or without the help of the people of Succoth and Penuel, Gideon knew he would win the battle (saying **when**, not *if*). Yet he vowed to take revenge on these cities that refused to help the army of Israel at this strategic time.

i. "Some have said that this showed resentment and harshness, but when a man is at war, he is not in the habit of sprinkling his adversaries with rosewater. War is in itself so great an evil that there are many other evils necessarily connected with it. It seems to me that if, when Gideon was trying to deliver his own countrymen, they scoffed at him, and refused him bread for his soldiers in the day of their hunger, they deserved to be punished with great severity." (Spurgeon)

3. (10-12) *Two Midianite kings and their armies are routed.*

**Now Zebah and Zalmunna were at Karkor, and their armies with them, about fifteen thousand, all who were left of all the army of the people of the East; for one hundred and twenty thousand men who drew the sword had fallen. Then Gideon went up by the road of those who dwell in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah; and he attacked the army while the camp felt secure. When Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued them; and he took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and routed the whole army.**

a. **He attacked the army while the camp felt secure:**

Gideon, continuing in the boldness of the LORD, led a courageous surprise attack. This wasn't the same as 300 attacking the vast army described in Jdg 7:12, but it was still a small army against a much larger army.

i. We can suppose that Gideon was bold enough to do this because he saw God do great things in similar circumstances before. The previous work of God encouraged him to trust God for great things in the present.

b. **He pursued them... and routed the whole army:**

This shows the *persistence* of Gideon. He fought until the

battle was won, and he went after the leaders of the opposition.

*4. (13-17) Gideon repays Succoth and Penuel.*

**Then Gideon the son of Joash returned from battle, from the Ascent of Heres. And he caught a young man of the men of Succoth and interrogated him; and he wrote down for him the leaders of Succoth and its elders, seventy-seven men. Then he came to the men of Succoth and said, "Here are Zebah and Zalmunna, about whom you ridiculed me, saying, 'Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in your hand, that we should give bread to your weary men?'" And he took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth. Then he tore down the tower of Penuel and killed the men of the city.**

a. **He came to the men of Succoth and said:** The men of this city didn't want to help Gideon or his army before victory was assured. They refused to help Gideon by *faith*, and so Gideon would punish them as he had promised.

b. **He took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth:** Apparently Gideon publicly whipped the leaders of the city of Succoth with **thorns** and **briers** as a method of public rebuke.

c. **He tore down the tower of Penuel and killed the men of the city:** The text does not make it clear, but we suppose there was a justification for this severe penalty. Perhaps the people of Penuel were significant supporters of the Midianites and traitors against Israel.

*5. (18-21) Gideon repays the two Midianite kings.*

And he said to Zebah and Zalmunna, "What kind of men *were they* whom you killed at Tabor?" So they answered, "As you *are*, so *were* they; each one resembled the son of a king." Then he said, "They *were* my brothers, the sons of my mother. As the LORD lives, if you had let them live, I would not kill you." And he said to Jether his firstborn, "Rise, kill them!" But the youth would not draw his sword; for he was afraid, because he *was* still a youth. So Zebah and Zalmunna said, "Rise yourself, and kill us; for as a man *is*, so *is* his strength." So Gideon arose and killed Zebah and Zalmunna, and took the crescent ornaments that *were* on their camels' necks.

a. **They were my brothers, the sons of my mother:** Apparently these two Midianite kings were responsible for the death of Gideon's **brothers**. Gideon wanted this known and confessed before he executed these kings.

b. **Rise yourself, and kill us:** Zebah and Zalmunna knew they deserved death and even encouraged their executioner.

## **B. Israel under Gideon as a judge.**

1. (22-23) *Gideon refuses to be made king.*

Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, "Rule over us, both you and your son, and your grandson also; for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian." But Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD shall rule over you."

a. **Rule over us:** The desire for a human king over Israel started early in the nation's history. Hundreds of years later (in the days of Samuel the prophet and judge), God gave Israel the king they asked for.

i. "They found relief in the judges who were raised up of God, and began to hanker after some ruler, visible, and of their own number. They thought that, by securing this, they would preserve themselves from the recurrence of these troubles." (Morgan)

b. **I will not rule over you:** This was a good response from Gideon. He understood that it was not his place to take the throne over Israel, and that the LORD God was king over Israel.

i. "That is the true attitude of all those whom God raised up to lead and deliver His people. Their leadership must ever stop short of sovereignty. Their business is never that of superseding the Divine rule; but of interpreting it, and of leading the people to recognition of it, and submission to it. This is true, not only of kings, but also of priests, prophets, and preachers." (Morgan)

ii. Gideon definitely gave the right answer when he *said* he didn't want to be a king; yet in the rest of the chapter he acted like one. His words were humble, but his actions were not. It is easier to talk about humility and service to God than it is to actually live it.

## *2. (24-26) Gideon gathers a fortune.*

**Then Gideon said to them, "I would like to make a request of you, that each of you would give me the earrings from his plunder." For they had gold earrings, because they *were* Ishmaelites. So they answered, "We will gladly give *them*." And they spread out a garment, and each man threw into it the earrings from his plunder. Now the weight of the gold earrings that he requested was one thousand seven hundred *shekels* of gold, besides the crescent ornaments, pendants, and purple robes which *were***



**on the kings of Midian, and besides the chains that were around their camels' necks.**

a. **That each of you would give me the earrings from his plunder:** This didn't seem like much to ask for, yet when it was added up, it came to more than 50 pounds (22 kilograms) of gold. This was quite a fortune.

b. **We will gladly give them:** The people were happy to give this, and it is hard to say that Gideon did not *deserve* this huge fortune. At the same time it was inappropriate, because it lifted him far above the level of the people he would lead, and it was at their expense.

i. A general rule of thumb is that Christian leaders who make their living from the gifts of God's people should live at the level of their own people - not below or above.

*3. (27) Gideon, using the riches he received, assumes an inappropriate role of religious leadership and leads Israel into idolatry.*

**Then Gideon made it into an ephod and set it up in his city, Ophrah. And all Israel played the harlot with it there. It became a snare to Gideon and to his house.**

a. **Gideon made it into an ephod and set it up in his city:** An ephod is a shirt-like garment worn by the priests of Israel (Exodus 28). This was obviously wrong, and it is not immediately apparent why Gideon did this. It is possible he did this to work against the prestige and influence of the tribe of Ephraim. At this time the tabernacle - the center of worship for Israel - was at Shiloh, in the territory of Ephraim. Gideon perhaps set up this rival place of worship to compete against the tribe that troubled him in the battle against Midian.

i. "While this was probably done out of a sense of the religious failure of the people, the effect produced was

evil and resulted in deterioration of the character of Gideon himself.” (Morgan)

ii. “He did not set up an idol, but he made an ephod, an imitation of that wonderful vestment worn by the high priest. Perhaps he made it of solid gold, not to be worn, but to be looked at, simply to remind the people of the worship of God, and not to be itself worshipped. But ah, dear friends, you see here that, if we go half an inch beyond what God’s Word warrants we always get into mischief!” (Spurgeon)

b. **And all Israel played the harlot with it there:** The people of Israel *enjoyed* this idolatrous worship. The beautiful and expensive ephod **became a snare** to Gideon, his family, and all Israel.

i. Artistic beauty has a way of impressing us and giving a sense of awe, but it is not necessarily a godly impression or awe. Many times, it can distract our focus from the LORD. In contrast to this ephod, God commanded that His altars be made of unfinished stone (Exo 20:25), so that no one’s attention was focused on the beauty of the stone carver’s work.

ii. Gideon was remarkably obedient and filled with faith in the extreme moment of battle. The routine of daily living seems to have been a greater test of his character. This is true for many, and the challenges of daily living are more difficult than those of the extreme moment.

iii. “Perhaps it is easier to honour God in some courageous action in the limelight of a time of national emergency than it is to honour Him consistently in the ordinary, everyday life, which requires a different kind of courage.” (Cundall)

4. (28-30) *Gideon assumes a kingly harem.*

**Thus Midian was subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted their heads no more. And the country was quiet for forty years in the days of Gideon. Then Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and dwelt in his own house. Gideon had seventy sons who were his own offspring, for he had many wives.**

a. **Thus Midian was subdued:** Regarding the security of the nation, Gideon's rule as a judge over Israel was a success. Yet in many ways he was a spiritual failure.

b. **For he had many wives:** A harem was not only a reflection of a man's inability to control his sexual lust, it was also a way for him to proudly express his wealth, by saying "Look at all the wives and children I can support."

i. The Old Testament never directly condemns polygamy (though the New Testament does in Mat 19:4-6 and 1Ti 3:2). Yet the Old Testament shows the bitter fruit of polygamy. The stories of polygamous families in the Old Testament (such as with Jacob or David) are the stories of conflict and crisis.

*5. (31-32) Gideon assumes – or hopes for – a hereditary rule.*

**And his concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, whose name he called Abimelech. Now Gideon the son of Joash died at a good old age, and was buried in the tomb of Joash his father, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.**

a. **Whose name he called Abimelech:** The name **Abimelech** means, "My father, a king." It is the kind of name that a king himself would bear. It seems that Gideon intended that his son would become the leader of Israel after Gideon himself was gone.

**b. Gideon the son of Joash died at a good old age:**

Through his career, we see Gideon as a man who slipped from great heights of faith to a place of outright apostasy and rebellion against God. We could say that Gideon handled adversity better than success. Success, riches, and prominence brought him down.

i. It isn't enough for us to begin well with God. We must continue on throughout our whole Christian life. Gideon, in his later years, had to *look back* to see anything done for God. All those works were in the past.

6. (33-35) *After Gideon, Israel rebels and makes a covenant with Baal.*

**So it was, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals, and made Baal-Berith their god. Thus the children of Israel did not remember the LORD their God, who had delivered them from the hands of all their enemies on every side; nor did they show kindness to the house of Jerubbaal (Gideon) in accordance with the good he had done for Israel.**

a. **As soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals:** In a sense, Israel served the memory of Gideon well, especially the Gideon of his later years. By serving Baal, Israel said, "What really matters is money and success," and in this they followed the example of Gideon in his later years.

b. **And made Baal-Berith their god:** The name **Baal-Berith** means "Baal of the Covenant." The Israelites sadly regarded Baal as their covenant god.

## **Abimelech's Conspiracy**

Jdg 9:1 Gideon's son Abimelech went to the town of Shechem, where all his mother's relatives lived, and told them

**Jdg 9:2** to ask the men of Shechem, "Which would you prefer? To have all seventy of Gideon's sons govern you or to have just one man? Remember that Abimelech is your own flesh and blood."

Jdg 9:3 His mother's relatives talked to the men of Shechem about this for him, and the men of Shechem decided to follow Abimelech because he was their relative.

Jdg 9:4 They gave him seventy pieces of silver from the temple of Baal-of-the-Covenant, and with this money he hired a bunch of worthless scoundrels to join him.

Jdg 9:5 He went to his father's house at Ophrah, and there on top of a single stone he killed his seventy brothers, Gideon's sons. But Jotham, Gideon's youngest son, hid and was not killed.

Jdg 9:6 Then all the men of Shechem and Bethmillo got together and went to the sacred oak tree at Shechem, where they made Abimelech king.

Jdg 9:7 When Jotham heard about this, he went and stood on top of Mount Gerizim and shouted out to them, "Listen to me, you men of Shechem, and God may listen to you!"

Jdg 9:8 Once upon a time the trees went out to choose a king for themselves. They said to the olive tree, 'Be our king.'

Jdg 9:9 The olive tree answered, 'In order to govern you, I would have to stop producing my oil, which is used to honor gods and human beings.'

Jdg 9:10 Then the trees said to the fig tree, 'You come and be our king.'

Jdg 9:11 But the fig tree answered, 'In order to govern you, I would have to stop producing my good sweet fruit.'

Jdg 9:12 So the trees then said to the grapevine, 'You come and be our king.'

Jdg 9:13 But the vine answered, 'In order to govern you, I would have to stop producing my wine, that makes gods and human beings happy.'

Jdg 9:14 So then all the trees said to the thorn bush, 'You come and be our king.'

Jdg 9:15 The thorn bush answered, 'If you really want to make me your king, then come and take shelter in my shade. If you don't, fire will blaze out of my thorny branches and burn up the cedars of Lebanon.'

Jdg 9:16 "Now then," Jotham continued, "were you really honest and sincere when you made Abimelech king? Did you respect Gideon's memory and treat his family properly, as his actions deserved?"

Jdg 9:17 Remember that my father fought for you. He risked his life to save you from the Midianites.

Jdg 9:18 But today you turned against my father's family. You killed his sons—seventy men on a single stone—and just because Abimelech, his son by his servant woman, is your relative, you have made him king of Shechem.

Jdg 9:19 Now then, if what you did today to Gideon and his family was sincere and honest, then be happy with Abimelech and let him be happy with you.

Jdg 9:20 But if not, may fire blaze out from Abimelech and burn up the men of Shechem and Bethmillo. May fire blaze out from the men of Shechem and Bethmillo and burn Abimelech up."

Jdg 9:21 Then because he was afraid of his brother Abimelech, Jotham ran away and went to live at Beer.

### **The Downfall of Abimelech**

Jdg 9:22 Abimelech ruled Israel for three years.

Jdg 9:23 Then God made Abimelech and the men of Shechem hostile to each other, and they rebelled against Abimelech.

Jdg 9:24 This happened so that Abimelech and the men of Shechem, who encouraged him to murder Gideon's seventy sons, would pay for their crime.

Jdg 9:25 The men of Shechem put men in ambush against Abimelech on the mountaintops, and they robbed everyone who passed their way. Abimelech was told about this.

Jdg 9:26 Then Gaal son of Ebed came to Shechem with his brothers, and the men of Shechem put their confidence in him.

Jdg 9:27 They all went out into their vineyards and picked the grapes, made wine from them, and held a festival. They went into the temple of their god, where they ate and drank and made fun of Abimelech.

Jdg 9:28 Gaal said, "What kind of men are we in Shechem? Why are we serving Abimelech? Who is he, anyway? The son of Gideon! And Zebul takes orders from him, but why should we serve him? Be loyal to your ancestor Hamor, who founded your clan!

Jdg 9:29 I wish I were leading this people! I would get rid of Abimelech! I would tell him, 'Reinforce your army, come on out and fight!' "

Jdg 9:30 Zebul, the ruler of the city, became angry when he heard what Gaal had said.

Jdg 9:31 He sent messengers to Abimelech at Arumah to say, "Gaal son of Ebed and his brothers have come to Shechem, and they are not going to let you into the city.

Jdg 9:32 Now then, you and your men should move by night and hide in the fields.

Jdg 9:33 Get up tomorrow morning at sunrise and make a sudden attack on the city. Then when Gaal and his men come out against you, hit them with all you've got!"

Jdg 9:34 So Abimelech and all his men made their move at night and hid outside Shechem in four groups.

Jdg 9:35 When Abimelech and his men saw Gaal come out and stand at the city gate, they got up from their hiding places.

Jdg 9:36 Gaal saw them and said to Zebul, "Look! There are men coming down from the mountaintops!" "Those are not men," Zebul answered. "They are just shadows on the mountains."

Jdg 9:37 Gaal said again, "Look! There are men coming down the crest of the mountain and one group is coming along the road from the oak tree of the fortunetellers!"

Jdg 9:38 Then Zebul said to him, "Where is all your big talk now? You were the one who asked why we should serve this man Abimelech. These are the men you were making fun of. Go on out now and fight them."

Jdg 9:39 Gaal led the men of Shechem out and fought Abimelech.

Jdg 9:40 Abimelech started after Gaal, and Gaal ran. Many were wounded, even at the city gate.

Jdg 9:41 Abimelech lived in Arumah, and Zebul drove Gaal and his brothers out of Shechem, so that they could no longer live there.

Jdg 9:42 The next day Abimelech found out that the people of Shechem were planning to go out into the fields,

Jdg 9:43 so he took his men, divided them into three groups, and hid in the fields, waiting. When he saw the people coming out of the city, he came out of hiding to kill them.

Jdg 9:44 While Abimelech and his group hurried forward to guard the city gate, the other two companies attacked the people in the fields and killed them all.

Jdg 9:45 The fighting continued all day long. Abimelech captured the city, killed its people, tore it down, and covered



the ground with salt.

Jdg 9:46 When all the leading men in the fort at Shechem heard about this, they sought safety in the stronghold of the temple of Baal-of-the-Covenant.

Jdg 9:47 Abimelech was told that they had gathered there,  
Jdg 9:48 so he went up to Mount Zalmon with his men. There he took an ax, cut a limb off a tree, and put it on his shoulder. He told his men to hurry and do the same thing.

Jdg 9:49 So everyone cut off a tree limb; then they followed Abimelech and piled the wood up against the stronghold. They set it on fire, with the people inside, and all the people of the fort died—about a thousand men and women.

Jdg 9:50 Then Abimelech went to Thebez, surrounded that city, and captured it.

Jdg 9:51 There was a strong tower there, and every man and woman in the city, including the leaders, ran to it. They locked themselves in and went up to the roof.

Jdg 9:52 When Abimelech came to attack the tower, he went up to the door to set the tower on fire.

Jdg 9:53 But a woman threw a millstone down on his head and fractured his skull.

Jdg 9:54 Then he quickly called the young man who was carrying his weapons and told him, "Draw your sword and kill me. I don't want it said that a woman killed me." So the young man ran him through, and he died.

Jdg 9:55 When the Israelites saw that Abimelech was dead, they all went home.

Jdg 9:56 And so it was that God paid Abimelech back for the crime that he committed against his father in killing his seventy brothers.

Jdg 9:57 God also made the men of Shechem suffer for their wickedness, just as Jotham, Gideon's son, said they would when he cursed them.

# Judges 9:1-57

## Judges 9 - The Rise and Fall of Abimelech

### A. Abimelech's rise to power.

1. (1-3) *Abimelech forces his brothers to submit to him.*

**Then Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem, to his mother's brothers, and spoke with them and with all the family of the house of his mother's father, saying, "Please speak in the hearing of all the men of Shechem: 'Which is better for you, that all seventy of the sons of Jerubbaal reign over you, or that one reign over you?' Remember that I *am* your own flesh and bone."** And his mother's brothers spoke all these words concerning him in the hearing of all the men of Shechem; and their heart was inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, "He is our brother."

a. **Then Abimelech the Son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem:** Abimelech was the son of **Jerubbaal** (another name for Gideon given in Jdg 8:35), but he was not the clear successor to his father's place of leadership. This was for two reasons: God had not established a hereditary monarchy in Israel, and there were sixty-nine other sons of Gideon (Jdg 8:30) who might also want to succeed their father.

b. **Their heart was inclined to follow Abimelech:** At the city of Shechem, Abimelech convinced his brothers on his mother's side to support him as king over his brothers on his father's (Gideon's) side. So, the **men of Shechem** agreed to accept Abimelech as the new leader - perhaps even the king - of Israel.

i. "The reference to the *men of Shechem* (Jdg 9:2) is literally 'the baals of Shechem', the word having here

its original meaning of 'lord' or 'owner.'" (Cundall)

2. (4-5) *Abimelech murders his brothers.*

**So they gave him seventy *shekels* of silver from the temple of Baal-Berith, with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless men; and they followed him. Then he went to his father's house at Ophrah and killed his brothers, the seventy sons of Jerubbaal, on one stone. But Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left, because he hid himself.**

a. **So they gave him seventy shekels of silver from the temple of Baal-Berith:** The relatives of Abimelech on his mother's side gave him some "start-up money" to establish his leadership. He did this, but in a way that they never imagined - he hired **worthless and reckless men** to kill all his brothers, making certain there would never be a challenger to his leadership.

i. **From the temple of Baal-Berith:** Abimelech received his pay from the temple dedicated to Baal. "A work begun under the name and influence of the devil is not likely to end to the glory of God, or to the welfare of man." (Clarke)

b. **Killed his brothers, the seventy sons of Jerubbaal:** Therefore, Abimelech killed his brothers with the support of his relatives on his mother's side. The *men of Shechem* (Jdg 9:2-3) supported the plan because it was good *for them*, not because it was morally good or right.

3. (6) *The men of Shechem make Abimelech their king.*

**And all the men of Shechem gathered together, all of Beth Millo, and they went and made Abimelech king beside the terebinth tree at the pillar that was in Shechem.**

a. **They went and made Abimelech king:** It is almost hard to tell who was worse; Abimelech who did the murdering, or the **men of Shechem** who approved of it. This was an ungodly leader given to an ungodly people, who first rejected God's leadership over the nation and then embraced a cruel and brutal man.

i. **Beth Millo:** "The word *millō* derives from a verb meaning 'to be filled', and originally referred to a rampart or earthwork; but its association with fortifications may have developed into a reference to fortresses generally. Thus *Beth-millo* may be identical with *the tower of Shechem*." (Cundall)

b. **Beside the terebinth tree at the pillar that was in Shechem:** Ironically, Abimelech's coronation took place at the same tree where Joshua had solemnly placed a copy of the law of God (Jos 24:26). The law was right there, but Israel refused to read or heed it.

i. "Nevertheless, Abimelech became the first person ever to be crowned king in Israel. His abortive rule, however, ran roughshod over the divine requirements for that office." (Wolf)

ii. "The associations of such sites were very tenacious and it is of interest to note that Rehoboam went to Shechem, following the death of Solomon, to secure the acclimation of the Israelites although the city itself was in ruins at the time (1Ki 12:1; 1Ki 12:25)."

(Cundall)

## **B. Jotham's warning.**

1. (7-15) *The parable of the trees.*

**Now when they told Jotham, he went and stood on top of Mount Gerizim, and lifted his voice and cried out. And he said to them:**

**"Listen to me, you men of Shechem,  
That God may listen to you!  
The trees once went forth to anoint a king over them.  
And they said to the olive tree,  
'Reign over us!'  
But the olive tree said to them,  
'Should I cease giving my oil,  
With which they honor God and men,  
And go to sway over trees?'  
Then the trees said to the fig tree,  
'You come *and* reign over us!'  
But the fig tree said to them,  
'Should I cease my sweetness and my good fruit,  
And go to sway over trees?'  
Then the trees said to the vine,  
'You come *and* reign over us!'  
But the vine said to them,  
'Should I cease my new wine,  
Which cheers *both* God and men,  
And go to sway over trees?'  
Then all the trees said to the bramble,  
'You come *and* reign over us!'  
And the bramble said to the trees,  
'If in truth you anoint me as king over you,  
*Then come and take shelter in my shade;*  
But if not, let fire come out of the bramble  
And devour the cedars of Lebanon!'"**

a. **Now when they told Jotham:** Jotham was the only son of Gideon to escape the massacre at the stone (Jdg 9:5). Here he told a parable to rebuke the men of Shechem for their choice of Abimelech as a king.

i. He made this speech from the **top of Mount Gerizim**, the mountain from which Israel heard the blessings of God pronounced upon the obedient

(Deu 11:29; Deu 27:12; Jos 8:33) about 150 years before.

b. **The trees once went forth to anoint a king over them:** In the parable told by Jotham, the worthy trees (such as the **olive**, the **fig**, and the **vine**) didn't want to be king; but the unworthy **bramble** agreed to be king.

i. The promise of the bramble, "**take shelter in my shade**," was intended as ironic and ridiculous. The bramble was a low, thorny bush and offered shade to no one, especially to trees.

c. **Let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon:** The bramble warned that he would be an oppressive ruler and destroy anyone who disagreed with him.

i. One test of the character of a man is to see how he treats those who disagree with him. If his only desire is to destroy those who disagree, then he is much like the **bramble** - plenty of good points, but no real substance for good.

ii. "Finally, the position was offered to the *bramble*, which not only produced nothing of value and was quite worthless as timber, but was a positive menace to the farmer who had to wage continual war against its encroachments." (Cundall)

iii. "The condensed moral of the whole fable is this: Weak, worthless, and wicked men, will ever be foremost to thrust themselves into power; and, in the end, to bring ruin upon themselves, and on the unhappy people over whom they preside." (Clarke)

2. (16-21) *Jotham applies the parable: the city of Shechem will be repaid for choosing such a worthless man.*

**"Now therefore, if you have acted in truth and sincerity in making Abimelech king, and if you have**

dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have done to him as he deserves; for my father fought for you, risked his life, and delivered you out of the hand of Midian; but you have risen up against my father's house this day, and killed his seventy sons on one stone, and made Abimelech, the son of his maidservant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your brother; if then you have acted in truth and sincerity with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, *then* rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you. But if not, let fire come from Abimelech and devour the men of Shechem and Beth Millo; and let fire come from the men of Shechem and from Beth Millo and devour Abimelech!" And Jotham ran away and fled; and he went to Beer and dwelt there, for fear of Abimelech his brother.

a. **If you have acted in truth and sincerity:** Jotham raised this just for the sake of argument. He didn't believe that 68 of his brothers were murdered for the sake of **truth and sincerity**.

b. **Because he is your brother:** The real reason the men of Shechem supported Abimelech was because he was their **brother**. Abimelech's mother, though only a **maidservant** to Gideon, was from Shechem. Abimelech probably grew up in Shechem (Jdg\_8:31).

i. **Abimelech, the son of his maidservant:** "Abimelech's mother is called a 'slave girl', a term usually referring to a wife's servant who is also a concubine, such as Hagar or Bilhah." (Wolf)

c. **Let fire come from Abimelech and devour the men of Shechem:** Jotham's warning to the men of Shechem was that their unwise choice would come back to hurt them. He predicted that "**fire**" would come forth

from Abimelech and devour them. After this bold warning he **ran away and fled** for fear of his life.

- i. "The prophecy of Jotham was not to be immediately fulfilled. The fire smoldered for three years but at last manifested itself." (Morgan)

### **C. Jotham's warning fulfilled.**

1. (22-25) *A spirit of ill will between Abimelech and Shechem.*

**After Abimelech had reigned over Israel three years, God sent a spirit of ill will between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech, that the crime *done* to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might be settled and their blood be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who aided him in the killing of his brothers. And the men of Shechem set men in ambush against him on the tops of the mountains, and they robbed all who passed by them along that way; and it was told Abimelech.**

- a. **God sent a spirit of ill will between Abimelech and the men of Shechem:** Everything seemed fine between the men of Shechem and Abimelech for three years. Then, in judgment, God removed the peace that was between them and sent this

#### **spirit of ill will.**

- i. The writer of Judges used an interesting word to say that Abimelech had **reigned** over Israel. This word "is unique to the book and is perhaps chosen to distinguish Abimelech's ill-fated rule from that of the true judges. Abimelech was more like a tyrant than a king." (Wolf)
- ii. "The extent of Abimelech's kingdom was very limited; only Shechem, Beth-millo, Arumah



(Jdg 9:41) and Thebez (Jdg 9:50) are mentioned as under his jurisdiction and it is unlikely that it extended beyond a portion of western Manasseh." (Cundall)

iii. "God gave the devil commission to enter into or work upon their minds and hearts; knowing that he of himself, and by his own inclinations, would fill them with mistakes, and jealousies, and dissensions, and heart-burnings, which would end in civil wars and mutual ruin." (Poole)

**b. Set men in ambush... they robbed all who passed by:** Prompted by the **spirit of ill will**, the men of Shechem set ambushes on the mountain roads, hoping to disrupt the trade routes that profited Abimelech.

i. "This would have the effect of reducing the number of travelers and caravans in such a troubled area, thus emptying the pockets of Abimelech as well as hitting at his pride, for he could not guarantee the safety of travel in his domain." (Cundall)

*2. (26-29) The men of Shechem choose a new leader.*

**Now Gaal the son of Ebed came with his brothers and went over to Shechem; and the men of Shechem put their confidence in him. So they went out into the fields, and gathered *grapes* from their vineyards and trod *them*, and made merry. And they went into the house of their god, and ate and drank, and cursed Abimelech. Then Gaal the son of Ebed said, "Who *is* Abimelech, and who *is* Shechem, that we should serve him? *Is he* not the son of Jerubbaal, and *is not* Zebul his officer? Serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem; but why should we serve him? If only this people were under my authority! Then I would remove Abimelech." So he said to Abimelech, "Increase your army and come out!"**

a. **The men of Shechem put their confidence in him:**

The men of Shechem lost their confidence in Abimelech, so they chose a new leader named Gaal, the son of Ebed.

b. **They went into the house of their god, and ate and drank, and cursed Abimelech:**

The men of Shechem were so confident that their new leader Gaal could protect them against Abimelech that they started throwing drunken parties and openly cursing Abimelech and challenging him to a fight ("**Increase your army and come out!**").

3. (30-33) *The role of Zebul, the **ruler of the city**.*

**When Zebul, the ruler of the city, heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was aroused. And he sent messengers to Abimelech secretly, saying, "Take note! Gaal the son of Ebed and his brothers have come to Shechem; and here they are, fortifying the city against you. Now therefore, get up by night, you and the people who *are* with you, and lie in wait in the field. And it shall be, as soon as the sun is up in the morning, *that* you shall rise early and rush upon the city; and *when* he and the people who are with him come out against you, you may then do to them as you find opportunity."**

a. **When Zebul, the ruler of the city, heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was aroused:**

Zebul, the "city manager" on behalf of Abimelech, told Abimelech all about Gaal and this rebellion. Zebul advised Abimelech to come and attack the city.

b. **You shall rise early and rush upon the city:**

Zebul advised Abimelech to organize a surprised attack against the rebels of Shechem.

4. (34-41) *Abimelech defeats the rebellion of the men of Shechem, organized by Gaal.*

**So Abimelech and all the people who were with him rose by night, and lay in wait against Shechem in four companies. When Gaal the son of Ebed went out and stood in the entrance to the city gate, Abimelech and the people who were with him rose from lying in wait. And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, "Look, people are coming down from the tops of the mountains!" But Zebul said to him, "You see the shadows of the mountains as *if they were men.*" So Gaal spoke again and said, "See, people are coming down from the center of the land, and another company is coming from the Diviners' Terebinth Tree." Then Zebul said to him, "Where indeed *is* your mouth now, with which you said, 'Who is Abimelech, that we should serve him?' Are not these the people whom you despised? Go out, if you will, and fight with them now." So Gaal went out, leading the men of Shechem, and fought with Abimelech. And Abimelech chased him, and he fled from him; and many fell wounded, to the *very* entrance of the gate. Then Abimelech dwelt at Arumah, and Zebul drove out Gaal and his brothers, so that they would not dwell in Shechem.**

- a. **So Abimelech and all the people who were with him rose by night, and lay in wait:** Abimelech agreed with and followed the plan suggested by Zebul.

b. **Zebul said to him, “You see the shadows of the mountains as if they were men”:** Zebul deceived Gaal, allowing Abimelech’s troops to take position. With the advantage of their superior position, Abimelech and his soldiers drove out Gaal and his men.

c. **Where indeed is your mouth now:** When Zebul knew that Gaal was at a disadvantage, he could not resist rebuking him for his proud, arrogant words against Abimelech, an enemy he could not defeat.

i. “Gaal probably was not prepared for a siege; so he had little choice but to leave the city walls behind and confront Abimelech out in the open.” (Wolf)

5. (42-45) *Abimelech attacks the citizens of Shechem and conquers the city.*

**And it came about on the next day that the people went out into the field, and they told Abimelech. So he took his people, divided them into three companies, and lay in wait in the field. And he looked, and there were the people, coming out of the city; and he rose against them and attacked them. Then Abimelech and the company that *was* with him rushed forward and stood at the entrance of the gate of the city; and the *other* two companies rushed upon all who *were* in the fields and killed them. So Abimelech fought against the city all that day; he took the city and killed the people who *were* in it; and he demolished the city and sowed it with salt.**

a. **It came about on the next day:** With the resistance of Gaal defeated, Abimelech would find it easy to establish his control over the city of Shechem again. Both outside and inside the city, they effectively attacked and killed the people of Shechem (even those not directly involved in the rebellion).

i. "The people, apparently confident that the matter was concluded, *went out into the fields* as usual to engage in their daily occupations." (Cundall)

b. **He took the city and killed the people who were in it; and he demolished the city and sowed it with salt:** Abimelech then turned his fury against the people of Shechem, and killed as many of them as he could, and he demolished their city.

i. "Indeed, Shechem was not rebuilt until the reign of Jeroboam I, almost two centuries later (1Ki 12:25)."  
(Wolf)

ii. This shows the problem of following a man who comes to power through violence. Commonly, it is only a matter of time until the same violence is turned against those who helped him come to power.

#### 6. (46-49) *The massacre at the tower of Shechem.*

**Now when all the men of the tower of Shechem had heard *that*, they entered the stronghold of the temple of the god Berith. And it was told Abimelech that all the men of the tower of Shechem were gathered together. Then Abimelech went up to Mount Zalmon, he and all the people who *were* with him. And Abimelech took an ax in his hand and cut down a bough from the trees, and took it and laid *it* on his shoulder; then he said to the people who were with him, "What you have seen me do, make haste *and* do as I *have done*. " So each of the people likewise cut down his own bough and followed Abimelech, put *them* against the stronghold, and set the stronghold on fire above them, so that all the people of the tower of Shechem died, about a thousand men and women.**

a. **Abimelech took an ax in his hand and cut down a bough..."What you have seen me do, make haste**

**and do as I have done”:** Though Abimelech was an ungodly and violent man, he did understand some basic principles of leadership. He understood the importance of leading through the example of one’s own actions. He could tell his troops to **do as I have done**, and they did.

**b. All the people of the tower of Shechem died, about a thousand men and women:** With this, Abimelech massacred the last survivors of the city of Shechem, killing about a thousand men and women. This graphically fulfilled the warning of Jotham earlier in the chapter (Jdg 9:19-20).

i. “This was as if a man should run into a stack of straw or barrel of gunpowder, to secure himself from a raging fire. Their covenant with Baal, that image of jealousy (Eze 8:3), was the cause of their ruin. They looked upon this hold as both a fort and a sanctuary; but it saved them not.” (Trapp)

ii. For the people of Shechem, even a secure tower could not protect them. Yet there is a more secure tower than the tower of Shechem. *The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe* (Pro 18:10). *For You have been a shelter for me, a strong tower from the enemy.* (Psa 61:3).

7. (50-55) *God’s judgment on Abimelech.*

**Then Abimelech went to Thebez, and he encamped against Thebez and took it. But there was a strong tower in the city, and all the men and women; all the people of the city; fled there and shut themselves in; then they went up to the top of the tower. So Abimelech came as far as the tower and fought against it; and he drew near the door of the tower to burn it with fire. But a certain woman dropped an upper millstone on Abimelech’s head and crushed his skull. Then he called quickly to the young man, his**

armorbearer, and said to him, "Draw your sword and kill me, lest men say of me, 'A woman killed him.'" So his young man thrust him through, and he died. And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they departed, every man to his place.

a. **Abimelech came as far as the tower and fought against it:** After his brutal victory at the tower of Shechem, Abimelech probably thought he was an expert at attacking towers. He went to **Thebez** and attacked the city and the tower there.

b. **A certain woman dropped an upper millstone on Abimelech's head and crushed his skull:** At Thebez, a woman dropped a millstone on Abimelech's head and mortally wounded him.

i. This was probably a stone used to grind grain by hand. "Such hand-stones averaged ten to fourteen inches long and weighed five pounds or more." (Wood)

c. **Draw your sword and kill me, lest men say of me, "A woman killed him.":** Abimelech considered it manlier to be killed by his own armor bearer; but he was still dead afterward. Proud even in death, he then had to answer to God for his wicked actions.

i. "Yet long after his death, the credit continued to be given to the woman (cf. 2Sa 11:21)." (Wolf)

ii. "But commentators observe it for a just hand of God upon Abimelech, that upon one stone he had slain his seventy brethren, and now a stone slayeth him: his head had stolen the crown of Israel, and now his head is smitten." (Trapp)

8. (56-57) *Summation: The certainty of God's judgments.*

**Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he had done to his father by killing his seventy**

**brothers. And all the evil of the men of Shechem God returned on their own heads, and on them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal.**

**a. Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech:**

We can be certain that God will repay wickedness, either in this life or the life to come. Often God finds a way to do it *both* in this life and the life to come.

**b. On them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal:** God had warned the men of Shechem through Jotham. Yet they rejected the warning of God, and therefore came to ruin.

i. We should each consider if God is warning us about something in the present time. The story of Abimelech, the men of Shechem, and Jotham shows us that there is a real and terrible price to pay for rejecting God's warnings.

## **Tola and Jair**

**Jdg 10:1** After Abimelech's death Tola, the son of Puah and grandson of Dodo, came to free Israel. He was from the tribe of Issachar and lived at Shamir in the hill country of Ephraim.

Jdg 10:2 He was Israel's leader for twenty-three years. Then he died and was buried at Shamir.

Jdg 10:3 After Tola came Jair from Gilead. He led Israel for twenty-two years.

Jdg 10:4 He had thirty sons who rode thirty donkeys. They had thirty cities in the land of Gilead, which are still called the villages of Jair.

Jdg 10:5 Jair died and was buried at Kamon.

## **Further Disobedience and Oppression**

Jdg 10:6 Once again the Israelites sinned against the LORD by worshiping the Baals and the Astartes, as well as the



gods of Syria, of Sidon, of Moab, of Ammon, and of Philistia. They abandoned the LORD and stopped worshiping him.

Jdg 10:7 So the LORD became angry with the Israelites, and let the Philistines and the Ammonites conquer them.

Jdg 10:8 For eighteen years they oppressed and persecuted all the Israelites who lived in Amorite country east of the Jordan River in Gilead.

Jdg 10:9 The Ammonites even crossed the Jordan to fight the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and Ephraim. Israel was in great distress.

Jdg 10:10 Then the Israelites cried out to the LORD and said, "We have sinned against you, for we left you, our God, and worshiped the Baals."

Jdg 10:11 The LORD gave them this answer: "The Egyptians, the Amorites, the Ammonites, the Philistines,

Jdg 10:12 the Sidonians, the Amalekites, and the Maonites oppressed you in the past, and you cried out to me. Did I not save you from them?

Jdg 10:13 But you still left me and worshiped other gods, so I am not going to rescue you again.

Jdg 10:14 Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen. Let them rescue you when you get in trouble."

Jdg 10:15 But the people of Israel said to the LORD, "We have sinned. Do whatever you like, but please, save us today."

Jdg 10:16 So they got rid of their foreign gods and worshiped the LORD; and he became troubled over Israel's distress.

Jdg 10:17 Then the Ammonite army prepared for battle and camped in Gilead. The people of Israel came together and camped at Mizpah in Gilead.

Jdg 10:18 There the people and the leaders of the Israelite tribes asked one another, "Who will lead the fight against

the Ammonites? Whoever does will be the leader of everyone in Gilead."

## **Judges 10:1-18**

### **Judges 10 - Two Minor Judges and More Oppression**

#### **A. Two "minor" judges.**

##### *1. (1-2) Tola.*

**After Abimelech there arose to save Israel Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar; and he dwelt in Shamir in the mountains of Ephraim. He judged Israel twenty-three years; and he died and was buried in Shamir.**

- a. **There arose to save Israel Tola:** We are not told much about the career of the judge Tola; only that his service as a judge lasted a relatively long time (**twenty-three years**).

##### *2. (3-5) Jair.*

**After him arose Jair, a Gileadite; and he judged Israel twenty-two years. Now he had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys; they also had thirty towns, which are called "Havoth Jair" to this day, which are in the land of Gilead. And Jair died and was buried in Camon.**

- a. **After him arose Jair:** We also know little about Jair's service as a leader of Israel. We do know that he served for about the same number of years as Tola before him (**twenty-two years**).
- b. **Now he had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys; they also had thirty towns:** This shows that Jair was a polygamous man, and a man of wealth and prestige. His many sons had fancy transportation and

their own territory to rule. Jair never took the title of king, but it seems that he acted like one.

## **B. Apostasy, servitude and supplication.**

### *1. (6) Israel's seven-fold apostasy.*

**Then the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the people of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; and they forsook the LORD and did not serve Him.**

a. **Then the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD:** This phrase is repeated seven times in the Book of Judges. It shows that the evil of Israel was even worse because they did it before the eyes of God. We could say that it is bad to commit adultery, but it is far more offensive to commit adultery before the eyes of your spouse.

b. **And served the Baals and the Ashtoreths:** The essence of Israel's sin was that they **served** other gods. Here, seven different ethnic and national gods are mentioned that Israel went after in idolatry.

i. Israel was attracted to these other gods not because of the beauty of an idol image, but because of what was associated with the pagan deity. Baal, the weather god, was associated with financial success. Ashtoreth, the goddess of fertility, was associated with love, sex, and romance. As for the other gods of the neighboring nations around them, it was a matter of conforming to the popular culture and doing what everyone else did.

ii. Israel's worship of neighboring gods reminds us that the people of God are often in danger of worshipping what the world worships.

**c. They forsook the LORD and did not serve Him:**

Perhaps Israel did not *consciously* forsake God. Yet adding the worship of pagan gods to the worship of the true God was to forsake the LORD. It seems that Israel was willing to worship just about anything *except* the true God. When a man stops believing in God, he does not believe in nothing; he believes in anything.

i. "Accordingly Peter Martyr giveth these two reasons here why the Israelites went so a whoring after these false gods of the several neighbour nations: (1.) Because they so flourished in wealth and honour, when themselves were so poor and contemptible; (2.) Because the worship of the true God was so severe, but the heathenish superstition licentious and pleasing to flesh and blood." (Trapp)

**2. (7-9) Israel's servitude.**

**So the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the people of Ammon. From that year they harassed and oppressed the children of Israel for eighteen years; all the children of Israel who were on the other side of the Jordan in the land of the Amorites, in Gilead. Moreover the people of Ammon crossed over the Jordan to fight against Judah also, against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was severely distressed.**

a. **He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the people of Ammon:** If Israel wanted to serve the gods of the Philistines and the Amorites, God would allow them to do so. He allowed them in the fullest sense, by *selling* them into servitude to the Philistines and Amorites.

b. **They harassed and oppressed the children of Israel:** Of course, Israel was never *blessed* when they

served these other gods. Instead, they were **harassed and oppressed**; they were **severely distressed** - but God gave them what they wanted.

3. (10-14) *Israel calls to the LORD; God's response to Israel.*

**And the children of Israel cried out to the LORD, saying, "We have sinned against You, because we have both forsaken our God and served the Baals!" So the LORD said to the children of Israel, "Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites and from the people of Ammon and from the Philistines? Also the Sidonians and Amalekites and Maonites oppressed you; and you cried out to Me, and I delivered you from their hand. Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods. Therefore I will deliver you no more. Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in your time of distress."**

a. **We have sinned against You:** The *words* of this cry seem fine, but God's response seems to indicate that He saw something lacking in Israel's repentance. One may cry out to the LORD, yet really just *wish* things were different. Crying out to God with the voice is not necessarily the same as crying out to Him with our heart.

i. God wanted from Israel the same thing He wants from us - a heart that will put its hand to the plow and not look back (Luk 9:62). He wants us to come to the place where we know that there is nothing worth following except God.

b. **Therefore I will deliver you no more:** God was harsh with Israel because they had to be genuinely sick of their sin before they would genuinely turn to God. God allowed Israel to experience the sickness of their sin.

- i. "For the first time it is recorded that He refused to save them, reminding them of how repeatedly they He had delivered them, and yet they had turned back to their evil courses. In the message of His anger there was clearly evident a purpose of love." (Morgan)
- ii. "This apparent rejection, and the apparent indifference to the pleas of His people, was designed to test the sincerity of their response." (Cundall)
- iii. One technique used to help people stop smoking is to put them in a small, unventilated room and make them smoke for hours on end, until they can hardly bear it. It makes them sick of smoking and makes them truly want to stop. In the same way, sometimes God will allow the natural consequences of our sin to crash upon us in concentrated form, so we can become sick of our sin.
- iv. **Which you have chosen:** "You have not been forced to worship these gods by your oppressors and tyrants; but you have freely chosen these gods before me." (Poole)

*4. (15-16) Repentance from Israel, mercy from God.*

**And the children of Israel said to the LORD, "We have sinned! Do to us whatever seems best to You; only deliver us this day, we pray." So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the LORD. And His soul could no longer endure the misery of Israel.**

- a. **Do to us whatever seems best to You:** This indicates that Israel came to a place of total surrender to God. The prayer that comes most naturally to us is, "Do to me whatever seems best to me." The change in heart meant that the season of affliction eventually did affect Israel in a good way.

b. **So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the LORD:** Israel finally discovered that the *worst* of serving God is better than the *best* of serving idols.

c. **His soul could no longer endure the misery of Israel:** God looked upon disobedient Israel with compassion, not hatred. It was “difficult” for God to allow Israel to stay in their misery, though it was best for them. Like the perfect loving parent, God hated to see Israel suffer, even when it was good for them. He longed to rescue them but would not do it until it was *good* for them.

i. “The Hebrew word literally means ‘impatient.’ It suggests God’s restlessness in the presence of suffering. It is the restlessness of His love, and that is the cause of His anger, and the governing principle in all its activities.” (Morgan)

ii. “God *grieves* for the miseries to which his creatures are reduced by their own sins. Be astonished ye heavens, at this; and shout for joy, all ye inhabitants of the earth! For, through the love whence this compassion flowed, God has visited and redeemed a lost world!” (Clarke)

iii. “*His soul was grieved*; not properly, or as to inward affection, for God being infinitely happy, is not capable of grieving; but figuratively, and as to outward expression. He acted towards them like one that felt their sufferings.” (Poole)

iv. “And now He grieves over you. If only you would forsake your sins and turn to Him, He would assuredly raise up a Jephthah for your help.” (Meyer)

5. (17-18) *Israel gathers, but without a leader.*

**Then the people of Ammon gathered together and encamped in Gilead. And the children of Israel assembled together and encamped in Mizpah. And the people, the leaders of Gilead, said to one another, "Who *is* the man who will begin the fight against the people of Ammon? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead."**

**a. The children of Israel assembled together and encamped in Mizpah:** In response to the Ammonite threat, Israel gathered together for defense.

**b. Who is the man who will begin the fight against the people of Ammon:** Israel gathered, but had no leader. God's pattern for doing great works among His people is to raise up a man. He could do the work all by Himself; He could send angels to do the work for Him; He could use a leaderless mob or a committee. Yet God's normal means of operating is to raise up a man, and through that man to do a great work. God uses leaders.

### **Jephthah Delivers Israel**

**Jdg 11:1** Jephthah, a brave soldier from Gilead, was the son of a prostitute. His father Gilead

Jdg 11:2 had other sons by his wife, and when they grew up, they forced Jephthah to leave home. They told him, "You will not inherit anything from our father; you are the son of another woman."

Jdg 11:3 Jephthah fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob. There he attracted a group of worthless men, and they went around with him.

Jdg 11:4 It was some time later that the Ammonites went to war against Israel.

Jdg 11:5 When this happened, the leaders of Gilead went to bring Jephthah back from the land of Tob.



Jdg 11:6 They told him, "Come and lead us, so that we can fight the Ammonites."

Jdg 11:7 But Jephthah answered, "You hated me so much that you forced me to leave my father's house. Why come to me now that you're in trouble?"

Jdg 11:8 They said to Jephthah, "We are turning to you now because we want you to go with us and fight the Ammonites and lead all the people of Gilead."

Jdg 11:9 Jephthah said to them, "If you take me back home to fight the Ammonites and the LORD gives me victory, I will be your ruler."

Jdg 11:10 They replied, "We agree. The LORD is our witness."

Jdg 11:11 So Jephthah went with the leaders of Gilead, and the people made him their ruler and leader. Jephthah stated his terms at Mizpah in the presence of the LORD.

Jdg 11:12 Then Jephthah sent messengers to the king of Ammon to say, "What is your quarrel with us? Why have you invaded our country?"

Jdg 11:13 The king of Ammon answered Jephthah's messengers, "When the Israelites came out of Egypt, they took away my land from the Arnon River to the Jabbok River and the Jordan River. Now you must give it back peacefully."

Jdg 11:14 Jephthah sent messengers back to the king of Ammon

Jdg 11:15 with this answer: "It is not true that Israel took away the land of Moab or the land of Ammon.

Jdg 11:16 This is what happened: when the Israelites left Egypt, they went through the desert to the Gulf of Aqaba and came to Kadesh.

Jdg 11:17 Then they sent messengers to the king of Edom to ask permission to go through his land. But the king of Edom would not let them. They also asked the king of Moab,

but neither would he let them go through his land. So the Israelites stayed at Kadesh.

Jdg 11:18 Then they went on through the desert, going around the land of Edom and the land of Moab until they came to the east side of Moab, on the other side of the Arnon River. They camped there, but they did not cross the Arnon because it was the boundary of Moab.

Jdg 11:19 Then the Israelites sent messengers to Sihon, the Amorite king of Heshbon, and asked him for permission to go through his country to their own land.

Jdg 11:20 But Sihon would not let Israel do it. He brought his whole army together, camped at Jahaz, and attacked Israel.

Jdg 11:21 But the LORD, the God of Israel, gave the Israelites victory over Sihon and his army. So the Israelites took possession of all the territory of the Amorites who lived in that country.

Jdg 11:22 They occupied all the Amorite territory from the Arnon in the south to the Jabbok in the north and from the desert on the east to the Jordan on the west.

Jdg 11:23 So it was the LORD, the God of Israel, who drove out the Amorites for his people, the Israelites.

Jdg 11:24 Are you going to try to take it back? You can keep whatever your god Chemosh has given you. But we are going to keep everything that the LORD, our God, has taken for us.

Jdg 11:25 Do you think you are any better than Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab? He never challenged Israel, did he? Did he ever go to war against us?

Jdg 11:26 For three hundred years Israel has occupied Heshbon and Aroer, and the towns around them, and all the cities on the banks of the Arnon River. Why haven't you taken them back in all this time?

Jdg 11:27 No, I have not done you any wrong. You are doing wrong by making war on me. The LORD is the judge. He will decide today between the Israelites and the Ammonites."

Jdg 11:28 But the king of Ammon paid no attention to this message from Jephthah.

### **Jephthah's Tragic Vow**

Jdg 11:29 Then the spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah. He went through Gilead and Manasseh and returned to Mizpah in Gilead and went on to Ammon.

Jdg 11:30 Jephthah promised the LORD: "If you will give me victory over the Ammonites,

Jdg 11:31 I will burn as an offering the first person that comes out of my house to meet me, when I come back from the victory. I will offer that person to you as a sacrifice."

Jdg 11:32 So Jephthah crossed the river to fight the Ammonites, and the LORD gave him victory.

Jdg 11:33 He struck at them from Aroer to the area around Minnith, twenty cities in all, and as far as Abel Keramim. There was a great slaughter, and the Ammonites were defeated by Israel.

Jdg 11:34 When Jephthah went back home to Mizpah, there was his daughter coming out to meet him, dancing and playing the tambourine. She was his only child.

Jdg 11:35 When he saw her, he tore his clothes in sorrow and said, "Oh, my daughter! You are breaking my heart! Why must it be you that causes me pain? I have made a solemn promise to the LORD, and I cannot take it back!"

Jdg 11:36 She told him, "If you have made a promise to the LORD, do what you said you would do to me, since the LORD has given you revenge on your enemies, the Ammonites."

Jdg 11:37 But she asked her father, "Do this one thing for me. Leave me alone for two months, so that I can go with my friends to wander in the mountains and grieve that I must die a virgin."

Jdg 11:38 He told her to go and sent her away for two months. She and her friends went up into the mountains and grieved because she was going to die unmarried and childless.

Jdg 11:39 After two months she came back to her father. He did what he had promised the LORD, and she died still a virgin. This was the origin of the custom in Israel

Jdg 11:40 that the Israelite women would go out for four days every year to grieve for the daughter of Jephthah of Gilead.

## **Judges 11:1-40**

### **Judges 11 - Jephthah and the Ammonites**

#### **A. Jephthah negotiates with the Ammonites.**

*1. (1-3) Jephthah's background before his rise to leadership.*

**Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valor, but he was the son of a harlot; and Gilead begot Jephthah. Gilead's wife bore sons; and when his wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out, and said to him, "You shall have no inheritance in our father's house, for you *are* the son of another woman." Then Jephthah fled from his brothers and dwelt in the land of Tob; and worthless men banded together with Jephthah and went out *raiding* with him.**

**a. Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valor:** This brave and notable man in Israel had a clouded pedigree. His mother was a **harlot**, a common heathen prostitute.

i. The *area* of Gilead was the part of Israel that lay *east* of the Jordan River, comprising the territory of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh. Coincidentally, Jephthah's father was also named **Gilead**.

**b. Jephthah fled from his brothers and dwelt in the land of Tob:** Rejected by his family because of his illegitimate ancestry, Jephthah grew up in this area in what would be modern-day Syria.

i. Though rejected by his family, God blessed and used Jephthah. "Howbeit God made choice of such a one here to be a deliverer of his people; and hath registered him among other of his worthies, famous for their faith (Hebrews 11). This is for the comfort of bastards, if believers, and born of God (Joh 1:12-13)." (Trapp)

ii. "The one thing which we emphasize is that God did not count the wrong for which he was not responsible, a disqualification. He raised him up; He gave him His Spirit; He employed him to deliver His people in the hour of their need." (Morgan)

iii. "*Tob* has been tentatively identified with the modern el-Taiyibeh, about 15 miles east-north-east of Ramoth-gilead, in the desolate area which lay just outside the eastern boundary of Israel and the northern frontier of Ammon." (Cundall)

**c. Worthless men banded together with Jephthah and went out raiding with him:** Jephthah wasn't necessarily the leader of a band of criminals. Adam Clarke explains that the term **worthless men** doesn't necessarily mean a bandit: "The word may, however, mean in this place *poor persons*, without property, and without employment."

i. "He and his band probably operated more in the manner of David and his group years later, protecting cities and settlements from marauders." (Wood) David did this in the period described in 1Sa 25:4-8, receiving pay from those whom they helped. It is also possible that they only plundered the villages of enemy peoples, such as the Ammonites.

2. (4-8) *The elders of Gilead call upon the leadership of Jephthah.*

**It came to pass after a time that the people of Ammon made war against Israel. And so it was, when the people of Ammon made war against Israel, that the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob. Then they said to Jephthah, "Come and be our commander, that we may fight against the people of Ammon." So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "Did you not hate me, and expel me from my father's house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?" And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "That is why we have turned again to you now, that you may go with us and fight against the people of Ammon, and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead."**

a. **The people of Ammon made war against Israel:** The nation of Ammon, the Ammonites, lived to the south of Israel. They were a semi-nomadic group of people who descended from Abraham's nephew Lot.

i. **Why have you come to me now when you are in distress:** "May not God justly say as much to most of us? We seldom seek to him till needs must." (Trapp)

b. **Come and be our commander, that we may fight against the people of Ammon:** Because of the crisis of the Ammonites, the leaders of Gilead were desperate for

an able leader, and they turned to Jephthah. They were willing to give him the authority as **head** over Gilead.

*3. (9-11) Jephthah's response to the leaders of Gilead.*

**So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "If you take me back home to fight against the people of Ammon, and the LORD delivers them to me, shall I be your head?" And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "The LORD will be a witness between us, if we do not do according to your words." Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and commander over them; and Jephthah spoke all his words before the LORD in Mizpah.**

a. **If you take me back home to fight against the people of Ammon, and the LORD delivers them to me, shall I be your head:** Jephthah was only willing to assume leadership in the crisis if he could also remain a leader after the crisis. He didn't want to be rejected again as a worthless man.

b. **Before the LORD in Mizpah:** This was the same place where the famous agreement between Laban and Jacob was made (Gen 31:43-50). The idea of **Mizpah** ("watch") is "If you do wrong according to this promise, God will see it and may He punish."

*4. (12-13) Jephthah negotiates with the King of the Ammonites.*

**Now Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the people of Ammon, saying, "What do you have against me, that you have come to fight against me in my land?" And the king of the people of Ammon answered the messengers of Jephthah, "Because Israel took away my land when they came up out of Egypt, from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok, and to the**

**Jordan. Now therefore, restore those *lands* peaceably."**

a. **What do you have against me, that you have come to fight against me in my land:** Jephthah asked a simple question: why are you in the land of Israel? Perhaps the whole dispute could be solved by negotiations and diplomacy instead of warfare.

b. **Because Israel took away my land when they came up out of Egypt:** The king of Ammon gave a simple reply, saying that they were in Israel because it was really their own land, and Israel took it from them unjustly.

*5. (14-28) Jephthah's response to the King of the Ammonites.*

**So Jephthah again sent messengers to the king of the people of Ammon, and said to him, "Thus says Jephthah: 'Israel did not take away the land of Moab, nor the land of the people of Ammon; for when Israel came up from Egypt, they walked through the wilderness as far as the Red Sea and came to Kadesh. Then Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, "Please let me pass through your land." But the king of Edom would not heed. And in like manner they sent to the king of Moab, but he would not *consent*. So Israel remained in Kadesh. And they went along through the wilderness and bypassed the land of Edom and the land of Moab, came to the east side of the land of Moab, and encamped on the other side of the Arnon. But they did not enter the border of Moab, for the Arnon *was* the border of Moab. Then Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, king of Heshbon; and Israel said to him, "Please let us pass through your land into our place." But Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through his territory. So**



**Sihon gathered all his people together, encamped in Jahaz, and fought against Israel. And the LORD God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they defeated them. Thus Israel gained possession of all the land of the Amorites, who inhabited that country. They took possession of all the territory of the Amorites, from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the wilderness to the Jordan. And now the LORD God of Israel has dispossessed the Amorites from before His people Israel; should you then possess it? Will you not possess whatever Chemosh your god gives you to possess? So whatever the LORD our God takes possession of before us, we will possess. And now, *are you any better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever strive against Israel? Did he ever fight against them? While Israel dwelt in Heshbon and its villages, in Aroer and its villages, and in all the cities along the banks of the Arnon, for three hundred years, why did you not recover *them* within that time? Therefore I have not sinned against you, but you wronged me by fighting against me. May the LORD, the Judge, render judgment this day between the children of Israel and the people of Ammon.*"** However, the king of the people of Ammon did not heed the words which Jephthah sent him.

**a. Israel did not take away the land of Moab, nor the land of the people of Ammon:** Jephthah's written response to the King of the Ammonites carefully explained why Israel had a right to the land that the Ammonites claimed was theirs.

**b. Thus Israel gained possession of all the land of the Amorites, who inhabited that country:** Jephthah reminded the King of the Ammonites that the Amorites conquered the Ammonites and took control of their land.

When Israel defeated the Amorites in battle, they justly took the land of the Amorites - which also happened to be the previous land of the Ammonites. The war against the Amorites was prompted by the vicious Amorite war against Israeli civilians.

c. **And now the LORD God of Israel has dispossessed the Amorites from before His people Israel; should you then possess it:** Jephthah argued that since God gave this land to Israel, the Ammonites had no claim over it.

d. **Will you not possess whatever Chemosh your god gives you to possess:** Jephthah argued that the Ammonite god Chemosh must show himself worthy to conquer the land of Israel. Since Israel held this land **for three hundred years**, it demonstrated that Chemosh was not greater than the God of Israel.

i. "The *three hundred years* is remarkably close to the total of the various figures for the judges and the periods of oppression given up to this point. The exact figure is 319 years." (Cundall)

ii. This was an inherent challenge: "If your god is mighty enough to give you the land, then let him do it. Let us see who is stronger - Yahweh or Chemosh."

iii. Jephthah did not see this battle as primarily between two armies, but between the God of Israel and the false god of Ammon. Jephthah showed true wisdom in seeing this as a spiritual battle

*first.*

iv. **Chemosh your god:** Chemosh was traditionally the god of the Moabites, not the Ammonites. But they may have worshipped each other's gods, and they may also have considered Chemosh and Milcom to be the same god with different names.

e. **However, the king of the people of Ammon did not heed the words which Jephthah sent him:** Jephthah's logical, reasoned response was of no effect upon the King of Ammon. War was therefore inevitable.

## **B. Victory and a vow.**

1. (29) *Jephthah gathers troops and advances courageously on Ammon.*

**Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh, and passed through Mizpah of Gilead; and from Mizpah of Gilead he advanced *toward* the people of Ammon.**

a. **Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah:** This was the source of Jephthah's courage and can be the source of courage for us as well. When we are beset by fears and anxieties, we need to fill our lives with Jesus and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

b. **He advanced toward the people of Ammon:** The filling of the Spirit makes us *advance*. We go forward in the sense of spiritual progress and we go forward in the sense of confronting the enemies of God.

2. (30-31) *Jephthah makes a rash vow, thinking it will help his cause before God.*

**And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD, and said, "If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering."**

a. **Jephthah made a vow to the LORD:** Though well intentioned, this was a foolish vow. Such vows can be attempts to manipulate God or put Him under obligation to ourselves. It is far more important to be on God's side than to try and persuade Him to be on your side.

i. Even a Spirit-filled man can do foolish things. The Holy Spirit does not overwhelm and control us, He guides us - and that guidance can be resisted or ignored at smaller or greater points.

ii. "There is no need to bribe God's help, as Jephthah did, by his rash promise. He will give gladly and freely out of His own heart of love the help and deliverance we need, if only our course is rightly ordered before Him." (Meyer)

**b. Whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me... I will offer it up as a burnt offering:**

Jephthah did not have a human sacrifice in mind. This is indicated by the ancient Hebrew grammar: "The masculine gender could be translated 'whatever comes out' or 'whoever comes out' and 'I will sacrifice it.'" (Wolf)

i. Commentator Adam Clarke agreed that according to the most accurate Hebrew scholars, the best translation is *I will consecrate it to the LORD, or I will offer it for a burnt-offering*. As he wrote, "If it be a thing fit for a *burnt-offering*, it shall be made one; if fit for the *service of God*, it shall be consecrated to him."

ii. Human sacrifice was strictly forbidden by the Mosaic Law in passages such as Lev 18:21 and Deu 12:31. It is almost certain that Jephthah was familiar with such passages because when he negotiated with the Ammonites he demonstrated that he knew God's Word.

*3. (32-33) God grants Israel victory over the Ammonites.*

**So Jephthah advanced toward the people of Ammon to fight against them, and the LORD delivered them into his hands. And he defeated them from Aroer as far as Minnith; twenty cities; and to Abel Keramim,**

**with a very great slaughter. Thus the people of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel.**

a. **And the LORD delivered them into his hands:** God won a great and important victory for Israel through Jephthah. He overcame bitterness and family rejection to meet a great need. Despite his difficult past, God still wonderfully used him.

b. **Thus the people of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel:** This was another victory for Israel won under the leadership of a Spirit-filled judge.

4. (34-35) *A difficult vow to fulfill.*

**When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, there was his daughter, coming out to meet him with timbrels and dancing; and she was *his* only child. Besides her he had neither son nor daughter. And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he tore his clothes, and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low! You are among those who trouble me! For I have given my word to the LORD, and I cannot go back on it."**

a. **When he saw her, he tore his clothes:** Jephthah made his foolish vow sincerely, fully intending to keep it. Yet he had not seriously considered the consequences of the vow. Therefore, he was grieved when his daughter was first to greet him out of his house.

b. **I have given my word to the LORD, and I cannot go back on it:** Jephthah's oath was foolish, and he should not have kept it. He had no right to punish or afflict his daughter in *any way* because of the vow he made to God.

i. It was one thing to make and keep the vow when Jephthah believed that a cow or a sheep would come out of the house at his arrival; yet when his daughter

came he should have immediately said, "I have made a foolish vow, and it would be more sinful for me to keep it than to break it. I will repent before God for my foolish vow."

ii. "He had made a rash vow, and such things are much better broken than kept. If a man makes a vow to commit a crime his vow to do so is in itself a sin, and the carrying out of his vow will be doubly sinful. If a man's vowing to do a thing made it necessary and right for him to do it, then the whole moral law might be suspended by the mere act of vowing, for a man might vow to steal, to commit adultery, or to murder, and then say, 'I was right in all those acts, because I vowed to do them.' This is self-evidently absurd, and to admit such a principle would be to destroy all morality." (Spurgeon)

iii. Ecc 5:1-2; Ecc 5:4-6 speak of the danger of making foolish vows. This passage makes it clear that it is better to not make vows at all than to make foolish vows. This does not mean that vows are bad - they can be good. It means we must take them seriously. Christians need to take seriously the sin of broken vows, and when we see them we must either repent and keep them or repent of the foolishness in ever making the vow, and seek God's release from the vow.

c. **I have given my word to the LORD, and I cannot go back on it:** At the same time, on the sake of principle only, there was something wonderful about the spirit of Jephthah's willingness to keep his vows, even when it cost him something. In the specific vow he was foolish and should not have kept it, but the tenacity of character that says, "**I have given my word to the**

**LORD, and I cannot go back on it”** is glorious and should be the word of every follower of Jesus Christ.

i. As followers of Jesus Christ, Jephthah’s statement reminds us of *what we have done*: **I have given my word to the LORD.**

- We have confessed our faith in Jesus Christ.
- We have declared ourselves as followers and disciples of Jesus Christ.
- We have praised God with our songs and words.
- We have proclaimed our part together with God’s people.

ii. As followers of Jesus Christ, Jephthah’s statement reminds us of *what we cannot do*: **I cannot go back on it.**

- We cannot go back for the sake of being persecuted.
- We cannot go back for the sake of being mocked.
- We cannot go back, even a little ways.
- To go back might show that our faith was always false.
- To go back would disgrace the work of Jesus on the cross.
- To go back would forsake heavenly reward.
- To go back would make no sense.

5. (36-40) *Jephthah fulfills his vow to God.*

**So she said to him, “My father, *if* you have given your word to the LORD, do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, because the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the people of Ammon.” Then she said to her father, “Let this thing be done**

for me: let me alone for two months, that I may go and wander on the mountains and bewail my virginity, my friends and I." So he said, "Go." And he sent her away *for two months*; and she went with her friends, and bewailed her virginity on the mountains. And it was so at the end of two months that she returned to her father, and he carried out his vow with her which he had vowed. She knew no man. And it became a custom in Israel *that* the daughters of Israel went four days each year to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.

a. **He carried out his vow with her which he had vowed:** Some think that Jephthah did really offer his daughter as a burnt offering. If he did, this was clearly an example of misguided zeal for God because God never *asked* him to make such a foolish vow or to fulfill it so foolishly.

i. Later in their history, Israel began to serve a terrible pagan god named Molech, who was appeased with child sacrifice in the most terrible way imaginable. God never asked to be served in this terrible way, and therefore it can't be blamed on God.

b. **She went with her friends, and bewailed her virginity... She knew no man:** These words indicate that it is more likely that Jephthah set his daughter aside for the tabernacle service according to the principle of Lev 27:2-4, where persons set apart to God in a vow were not required to be sacrificed (as animals were) but were "given" to the tabernacle in monetary value.

i. We know that there were women who were set apart for the tabernacle service; they were called *the women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle of meeting* (Exo 38:8; 1Sa 2:22). It is likely that



Jephthah's daughter became one of these women who served at the tabernacle.

ii. His daughter and her friends were rightly grieved that she was given to the tabernacle service before she was ever married. Probably most the women who *assembled at the door of the tabernacle* were older widows.

iii. By sending his unmarried, only daughter to the service of the tabernacle for the rest of her life, it shows how seriously both Jephthah and his daughter took his promise to God.

iv. Many commentators object and see no other option than to say that Jephthah horribly fulfilled his vow by the human sacrifice of his own daughter. "The attempt to commute the sentence of death to one of perpetual virginity cannot be sustained." (Cundall)

v. Yet her committal to be one of the *women who assembled at the tabernacle* still seems like the best explanation because Jephthah is listed as a hero of the faith (Heb 11:32). It is hard to think of him as doing something so contrary to God's ways as offering his daughter as a human sacrifice and still being mentioned as a man of faith in Hebrews 11.

### **Jephthah's Conflict with Ephraim**

**Jdg 12:1** The men of Ephraim prepared for battle; they crossed the Jordan River to Zaphon and said to Jephthah, "Why did you cross the border to fight the Ammonites without calling us to go with you? We'll burn the house down over your head!"

Jdg 12:2 But Jephthah told them, "My people and I had a serious quarrel with the Ammonites. I did call you, but you would not rescue me from them."

Jdg 12:3 When I saw that you were not going to, I risked my life and crossed the border to fight them, and the LORD gave me victory over them. So why are you coming up to fight me now?"

Jdg 12:4 Then Jephthah brought all the men of Gilead together, fought the men of Ephraim and defeated them. (The Ephraimites had said, "You Gileadites in Ephraim and Manasseh, you are deserters from Ephraim!")

Jdg 12:5 In order to keep the Ephraimites from escaping, the Gileadites captured the places where the Jordan could be crossed. When any Ephraimite who was trying to escape would ask permission to cross, the men of Gilead would ask, "Are you an Ephraimite?" If he said, "No,"

Jdg 12:6 they would tell him to say "Shibboleth." But he would say "Sibboleth," because he could not pronounce it correctly. Then they would grab him and kill him there at one of the Jordan River crossings. At that time forty-two thousand of the Ephraimites were killed.

Jdg 12:7 Jephthah led Israel for six years. Then he died and was buried in his hometown in Gilead.

### **Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon**

Jdg 12:8 After Jephthah, Ibzan from Bethlehem led Israel.

Jdg 12:9 He had thirty sons and thirty daughters. He gave his daughters in marriage outside the clan and brought thirty young women from outside the clan for his sons to marry. Ibzan led Israel for seven years,

Jdg 12:10 then he died and was buried at Bethlehem.

Jdg 12:11 After Ibzan, Elon from Zebulun led Israel for ten years.

Jdg 12:12 Then he died and was buried at Aijalon in the territory of Zebulun.

Jdg 12:13 After Elon, Abdon son of Hillel from Pirathon led Israel.

Jdg 12:14 He had forty sons and thirty grandsons, who rode on seventy donkeys. Abdon led Israel for eight years,  
Jdg 12:15 then he died and was buried at Pirathon in the territory of Ephraim in the hill country of the Amalekites.

## **Judges 12:1-15**

### **Judges 12 - Jephthah and the Ephraimites; Three Minor Judges**

#### **A. Jephthah and the Ephraimites conflict.**

*1. (1) The men of the tribe of Ephraim are angry with Jephthah.*

**Then the men of Ephraim gathered together, crossed over toward Zaphon, and said to Jephthah, "Why did you cross over to fight against the people of Ammon, and did not call us to go with you? We will burn your house down on you with fire!"**

**a. Why did you cross over to fight against the people of Ammon, and did not call us to go with you:** The tribe of Ephraim felt slighted by Jephthah and was angry that they did not have a central and prestigious role in the victorious battle over the Ammonites.

i. There is a tendency within all of us to not want to do a job unless we receive credit. It is evident that the people of the tribe of Ephraim were more concerned with getting the credit than with seeing a job done.

ii. "Why should the Ephraimites complain about a victory accomplished through God's intervention for the benefit of all the tribes? It was a strange jealousy that spurred on Ephraim." (Wolf)

iii. This seems to be a consistent problem with the people of the tribe of Ephraim; they gave a similar response to Gideon in Jdg 8:1-3. Then Gideon answered the complaining men of Ephraim with tact and diplomacy. Jephthah was a very different sort of man.

**b. We will burn your house down on you with fire:**

The people of Ephraim also backed up their anger with a threat. They threatened to burn down Jephthah's house with him in it.

i. "This clearly again reveals the sad disintegration of the nation. The consciousness of the unity of the people seems largely to have been lost." (Morgan)

*2. (2-3) Jephthah responds to the people of the tribe of Ephraim.*

**And Jephthah said to them, "My people and I were in a great struggle with the people of Ammon; and when I called you, you did not deliver me out of their hands. So when I saw that you would not deliver me, I took my life in my hands and crossed over against the people of Ammon; and the LORD delivered them into my hand. Why then have you come up to me this day to fight against me?"**

**a. The LORD delivered them into my hand:**

Jephthah's idea was clear. God won a great victory through him when the Ephraimites stood by, though they had the opportunity to help. In this he pointed out the essentially unjust character of their complaint.

**b. When I called you, you did not deliver me:** The people of Ephraim here seem to be simply chronic complainers. When they had a chance to step out boldly for God they did not do it. Yet when the work was done

and God was glorified, they complained that they didn't get to participate.

i. "The fact that a victory had been gained over their common enemy appears to have been overlooked. Accusation and counter-accusation followed in bewildering succession; the claim that they had been passed over was met by the charge that an appeal *had* been made to them to which they had not responded." (Cundall)

3. (4-6) *The Gileadites (led by Jephthah) overwhelm the people of the tribe of Ephraim.*

**Now Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead and fought against Ephraim. And the men of Gilead defeated Ephraim, because they said, "You Gileadites *are* fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites *and* among the Manassites." The Gileadites seized the fords of the Jordan before the Ephraimites *arrived*. And when *any* Ephraimite who escaped said, "Let me cross over," the men of Gilead would say to him, "Are you an Ephraimite?" If he said, "No," then they would say to him, "Then say, 'Shibboleth!'" And he would say, "Sibboleth," for he could not pronounce *it* right. Then they would take him and kill him at the fords of the Jordan. There fell at that time forty-two thousand Ephraimites.**

a. **The men of Gilead defeated Ephraim:** Apparently the men of Ephraim were better at talking than fighting, because the men of Gilead seemed to conquer them easily.

b. **Then they would say to him, "Then say, 'Shibboleth'":** The word **shibboleth** means either "ear of grain" or "flowing stream." With this word the people from the tribe of Ephraim were easily identified by their dialect. They had a hard time pronouncing the "h" in

**Shibboleth** and said *Sibboleth* instead, therefore giving themselves away.

i. It is said that during the Second World War, the German soldiers sometimes identified Russian Jews by the way they pronounced the word for corn: "*kookoorooza*." Their distinctive pronunciation revealed their ethnic background. So it was for these men of Ephraim. "The Ephraimites were betrayed by their speech; so was Peter many years afterward (Mat 26:73)." (Cundall)

ii. The term **shibboleth** therefore came into the English language as something which determines which side you are on. In modern English usage a shibboleth is the same as an "acid test."

iii. Today, there are certain true shibboleths in a person's vocabulary. In Jdg 12:6, you could know something about a person by how they said "**Shibboleth**." Today when someone talks about Jesus, you can listen to what they say and learn something about them. You can listen as they speak about the Bible, and you know something about them. It is also true that as much as our dialect gives us away, so does our everyday speech. Others should be able to tell that we are Christians by the way we talk.

iv. At the same time, "How thankful we should be, that our admission to the privilege of the Kingdom of God does not depend upon our pronunciation; that the reality of the new-birth is not tested by the accuracy with which we utter the creed; that we shall not be excluded from the gates of the New Jerusalem because we fail in the utterance of an 'h'!" (Meyer)

4. (7) *The remainder of Jephthah's time as a judge.*

**And Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried in among the cities of Gilead.**

**B. Three minor judges.**

*1. (8-10) The judge Ibzan.*

**After him, Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel. He had thirty sons. And he gave away thirty daughters in marriage, and brought in thirty daughters from elsewhere for his sons. He judged Israel seven years. Then Ibzan died and was buried at Bethlehem.**

a. **Ibzan of Bethlehem:** This does not seem to be the same city called "House of Bread" that David, son of Jesse would later make famous.

i. "*Beth-lehem* is not to be identified with Bethlehem in Judah, which is usually written as Bethlehem-judah... The likelihood is that this Beth-lehem was the town in western Zebulun, about 10 miles north of Megiddo (Jos 19:15)." (Cundall)

b. **He had thirty sons. And he gave away thirty daughters in marriage:** Ibzan practiced the traditional custom of making alliances through marriage and was wealthy and prestigious enough to have so many children and so many alliances through marriage.

*2. (11-12) The judge Elon.*

**After him, Elon the Zebulunite judged Israel. He judged Israel ten years. And Elon the Zebulunite died and was buried at Aijalon in the country of Zebulun.**

a. **Elon the Zebulunite:** He was next in a succession of briefly-reigning judges. He is also from a different tribe from the past few judges from before him. God called leaders from various tribes, instead of from one tribe only.

### *3. (13-15) The judge Abdon.*

**After him, Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite judged Israel. He had forty sons and thirty grandsons, who rode on seventy young donkeys. He judged Israel eight years. Then Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died and was buried in Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the mountains of the Amalekites.**

**a. He had forty sons and thirty grandsons, who rode on seventy young donkeys:** This was a demonstration of the wealth, prestige, and influence of this briefly-reigning judge.

i. "Pirathon was the birth-place of David's captain, Behaiah (2Sa 23:30; 1Ch 11:31; 1Ch 27:14)."  
(Cundall)

**b. In the mountains of the Amalekites:** These were the same Amalekites that God had put a curse upon for their treatment of the weakest and most vulnerable in the wilderness wanderings out of Egypt (Exo 17:8-13; Deu 25:17-19; 1Sa 15:2-3).

### **The Birth of Samson**

**Jdg 13:1** The Israelites sinned against the LORD again, and he let the Philistines rule them for forty years.

Jdg 13:2 At that time there was a man named Manoah from the town of Zorah. He was a member of the tribe of Dan. His wife had never been able to have children.

Jdg 13:3 The LORD's angel appeared to her and said, "You have never been able to have children, but you will soon be pregnant and have a son.

Jdg 13:4 Be sure not to drink any wine or beer, or eat any forbidden food;

Jdg 13:5 and after your son is born, you must never cut his hair, because from the day of his birth he will be dedicated



to God as a nazirite. He will begin the work of rescuing Israel from the Philistines."

Jdg 13:6 Then the woman went and told her husband, "A man of God has come to me, and he looked as frightening as the angel of God. I didn't ask him where he came from, and he didn't tell me his name.

Jdg 13:7 But he did tell me that I would become pregnant and have a son. He told me not to drink any wine or beer, or eat any forbidden food, because the boy is to be dedicated to God as a nazirite as long as he lives."

Jdg 13:8 Then Manoah prayed to the LORD, "Please, LORD, let the man of God that you sent come back to us and tell us what we must do with the boy when he is born."

Jdg 13:9 God did what Manoah asked, and his angel came back to the woman while she was sitting in the field. Her husband Manoah was not with her,

Jdg 13:10 so she ran at once and told him, "Look! The man who came to me the other day has appeared to me again."

Jdg 13:11 Manoah got up and followed his wife. He went to the man and asked, "Are you the man who talked to my wife?" "Yes," he answered.

Jdg 13:12 Then Manoah said, "Now then, when your words come true, what must the boy do? What kind of a life must he lead?"

Jdg 13:13 The LORD's angel answered, "Your wife must be sure to do everything that I have told her.

Jdg 13:14 She must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine; she must not drink any wine or beer, or eat any forbidden food. She must do everything that I have told her."

Jdg 13:15 (15-16) Not knowing that it was the LORD's angel, Manoah said to him, "Please do not go yet. Let us cook a young goat for you." But the angel said, "If I do stay,

I will not eat your food. But if you want to prepare it, burn it as an offering to the LORD."

Jdg 13:17 Manoah replied, "Tell us your name, so that we can honor you when your words come true."

Jdg 13:18 The angel asked, "Why do you want to know my name? It is a name of wonder."

Jdg 13:19 So Manoah took a young goat and some grain, and offered them on the rock altar to the LORD who works wonders.

Jdg 13:20 (20-21) While the flames were going up from the altar, Manoah and his wife saw the LORD's angel go up toward heaven in the flames. Manoah realized then that the man had been the LORD's angel, and he and his wife threw themselves face downward on the ground. They never saw the angel again.

Jdg 13:22 Manoah said to his wife, "We are sure to die, because we have seen God!"

Jdg 13:23 But his wife answered, "If the LORD had wanted to kill us, he would not have accepted our offerings; he would not have shown us all this or told us such things at this time."

Jdg 13:24 The woman gave birth to a son and named him Samson. The child grew and the LORD blessed him.

Jdg 13:25 And the LORD's power began to strengthen him while he was between Zorah and Eshtaol in the Camp of Dan.

## **Judges 13:1-25**

### **Judges 13 - The Birth of Samson**

#### **A. The Angel of the LORD announces the birth of Samson to Manoah's wife.**

*1. (1) Life in Israel at the time of Samson's birth.*

**Again the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years.**

a. **Again the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD:** The cycle of sin, bondage, repentance, deliverance, blessing, and sin again continued in the history of Israel. Into these times was born the next judge of Israel, Samson. In this sense Samson was truly a man of his times. He was a study in contrasts; a man of great strengths and great weaknesses. In this, he was a picture of Israel's history both during this period and generally; a picture of great heights and deep lows.

i. Samson is also an important example of unfulfilled potential. Though he did great things for God, it is staggering to consider what he *might* have done and been for God.

ii. "We have one of the strangest stories of the Old Testament, the story of Samson. It is the story of a great opportunity and a disastrous failure in the case of a man who might have wrought a great deliverance but failed." (Morgan)

b. **And the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines:** Because of Israel's sin and rebellion, God gained their attention again by bringing them into subjugation to the Philistines.

2. (2-3) *The Angel of the LORD appears to Manoah's wife.*

**Now there was a certain man from Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had no children. And the Angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, "Indeed now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son."**

a. **A certain man from Zorah:** The town of **Zorah** is about 14 miles [22.5 kilometers] west of Jerusalem. It was in the land of the tribe of Dan.

b. **And the Angel of the LORD appeared:** From the rest of the chapter, we see that we should regard this **Angel** as no mere angel. As seen before in the Book of Judges (Jdg 2:1-5; Jdg 6:11-24), this was Jesus on a special mission, appearing as a man before His incarnation in Bethlehem.

c. **You are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son:** This promise came as a great blessing to this woman burdened by childlessness.

3. (4-5) *Special instructions regarding the child to come.*

**“Now therefore, please be careful not to drink wine or *similar* drink, and not to eat anything unclean. For behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. And no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.”**

a. **The child shall be a Nazirite to God:** Num 6:1-21 describes the vow of a Nazirite. When under the vow, people regarded themselves as specially devoted to God, leaving their hair uncut, drinking no wine and eating no grape products, and avoiding any contact with anything dead.

b. **From the womb:** There was nothing particularly unusual about someone taking the vow of a Nazirite for a specific period of time. What was unusual in Samson’s case was that he was to live under the vow from his birth, and that his vow was intended to be a lifetime vow.

c. **Please be careful not to drink wine or similar drink, and not to eat anything unclean:** Manoah’s

wife also had to share in the Nazirite vow during the time she carried Samson.

d. **He shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines:** "There is almost a weird suggestiveness in the phrase used by the angel concerning him, 'He shall begin to save Israel.' His ultimate failure was as certainly foreknown as was his opportunity." (Morgan)

4. (6-7) *Manoah's wife reports the appearance of the Angel of the LORD to her husband.*

**So the woman came and told her husband, saying, "A Man of God came to me, and His countenance was like the countenance of the Angel of God, very awesome; but I did not ask Him where He was from, and He did not tell me His name. And He said to me, 'Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. Now drink no wine or *similar* drink, nor eat anything unclean, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.'"**

a. **A Man of God came to me:** This indicates that the *Angel of the LORD* appearing to Manoah's wife generally appeared to be a **Man**; yet **His countenance was like the countenance of the Angel of God**.

b. **I did not ask Him where He was from, and He did not tell me His name:** This shows the profound impact the appearance of the **Man of God** had upon Manoah's wife. He was **very awesome**; so much so that she did not ask questions about where **He was from** or what His **name** was.

**B. The Angel of the LORD announces the birth of Samson to Manoah.**

1. (8-14) *The Angel of the LORD reconfirms the words spoken before.*

**Then Manoah prayed to the LORD, and said, "O my Lord, please let the Man of God whom You sent come to us again and teach us what we shall do for the child who will be born." And God listened to the voice of Manoah, and the Angel of God came to the woman again as she was sitting in the field; but Manoah her husband was not with her. Then the woman ran in haste and told her husband, and said to him, "Look, the Man who came to me the *other* day has just now appeared to me!" So Manoah arose and followed his wife. When he came to the Man, he said to Him, "Are You the Man who spoke to this woman?" And He said, "I *am* ." Manoah said, "Now let Your words come to *pass*! What will be the boy's rule of life, and his work?" So the Angel of the LORD said to Manoah, "Of all that I said to the woman let her be careful. She may not eat anything that comes from the vine, nor may she drink wine or *similar* drink, nor eat anything unclean. All that I commanded her let her observe."**

**a. Please let the Man of God whom You sent come to us again and teach us what we shall do for the child who will be born:** Manoah already knew what God wanted him to do because the Angel of the LORD already told him. Here he asked for confirmation of the word previously spoken.

**b. What will be the boy's rule of life, and his work:** God honored Manoah's request for confirmation; but He did not answer this request to know the future. He simply called Manoah and his wife to obey what God already told them to do.

*2. (15-18) Manoah offers the Angel of the LORD a meal; the Angel of the LORD will only accept an offering.*

**Then Manoah said to the Angel of the LORD, "Please let us detain You, and we will prepare a young goat**

for You.” And the Angel of the LORD said to Manoah, “Though you detain Me, I will not eat your food. But if you offer a burnt offering, you must offer it to the LORD.” (For Manoah did not know He *was* the Angel of the LORD.) Then Manoah said to the Angel of the LORD, “What *is* Your name, that when Your words come *to pass* we may honor You?” And the Angel of the LORD said to him, “Why do you ask My name, seeing it *is* wonderful?”

a. **I will not eat your food. But if you offer a burnt offering, you must offer it to the LORD:** Here, the Angel of the LORD showed Himself to be God, in the sense that He did not need a meal but would accept a sacrificial offering made unto the LORD.

b. **Why do you ask My name, seeing it is wonderful:** Here the Angel of the LORD shows Himself to be Jesus, in taking the name **wonderful** (Isa 9:6).

3. (19-21) *The Angel of the **LORD** displays His authority to Manoah and his wife.*

**So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering, and offered it upon the rock to the LORD. And He did a wondrous thing while Manoah and his wife looked on; it happened as the flame went up toward heaven from the altar; the Angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar! When Manoah and his wife saw *this*, they fell on their faces to the ground. When the Angel of the LORD appeared no more to Manoah and his wife, then Manoah knew that He *was* the Angel of the LORD.**

a. **He did a wondrous thing while Manoah and his wife looked on:** The Angel of the LORD proved He was *wonderful* by doing a **wondrous** thing - ascending in the flame of sacrifice to heaven.

i. "The first remark arising out the story of Manoah and his wife is this – that oftentimes we pray for blessings which will make us tremble when we receive them...A second remark is this-Very frequently deep prostration of spirit is the forerunner of some remarkable blessing." (Spurgeon)

**b. Then Manoah knew that He was the Angel of the LORD:** For the first time, Manoah and his wife understood that this Person was no mere man or messenger from God. They realized they spoke with God Himself.

4. (22-23) *The reaction of Manoah and his wife.*

**And Manoah said to his wife, "We shall surely die, because we have seen God!" But his wife said to him, "If the LORD had desired to kill us, He would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering from our hands, nor would He have shown us all these things, nor would He have told us *such things* as these at this time."**

**a. We shall surely die, because we have seen God:** Manoah perhaps knew what God said to Moses in Exo 33:20 : *You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live.* Manoah feared that because they had just seen the LORD, they would shortly die.

**b. If the LORD had desired to kill us, He would not have accepted a burnt offering:** This was a perceptive response from Manoah's wife. She understood that God had not done so much for them to abandon them now. God's past work in our life is a promise of His future care and blessing for us.

i. Manoah's wife was an invaluable source of encouragement for his faith. She didn't criticize Manoah. She didn't say, "What a silly man you are."



What a stupid man you must be to be so frightened.” We can never strengthen someone’s faith by criticizing. We must do as Manoah’s wife did - encourage them and build faith up.

c. **He would not have accepted a burnt offering:** The basis of the faith of Manoah’s wife was that she knew that the **LORD** had accepted their offering to Him. The same principle works for the Christian believer today: If the

**LORD** wanted to do you evil, He would have never accepted an offering on your behalf – the offering of Jesus on the cross.

i. “Brother, if the Lord had meant to destroy us, he would not have shown us our sin, because we were happy enough previously, were we not? In our own poor way we were content enough, and if he did not mean to pardon us, it was not like the Lord to show us our sin, and so to torment us before our time, unless he meant to take it away.” (Spurgeon)

*5. (24-25) Samson born, and the Holy Spirit comes upon him.*

**So the woman bore a son and called his name Samson; and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him. And the Spirit of the LORD began to move upon him at Mahaneh Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.**

a. **So the woman bore a son and called his name Samson:** The promise from the Angel of LORD was fulfilled. It was proven to be true.

b. **And the LORD blessed him... And the Spirit of the LORD began to move upon Him:** This is the source of the great strength we see in Samson later. We usually think of Samson as a man with huge, rippling muscles; but others couldn’t figure out why he was so

strong. It is reasonable to think that he did not *look* very strong. Whether he looked strong or not, it was the Spirit of God who made him strong.

### **Samson's Marriage**

**Jdg 14:1** One day Samson went down to Timnah, where he noticed a certain young Philistine woman.

Jdg 14:2 He went back home and told his father and mother, "There is a Philistine woman down at Timnah who caught my attention. Get her for me; I want to marry her."

Jdg 14:3 But his father and mother asked him, "Why do you have to go to those heathen Philistines to get a wife? Can't you find someone in our own clan, among all our people?" But Samson told his father, "She is the one I want you to get for me. I like her."

Jdg 14:4 His parents did not know that it was the LORD who was leading Samson to do this, for the LORD was looking for a chance to fight the Philistines. At this time the Philistines were ruling Israel.

Jdg 14:5 So Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother. As they were going through the vineyards there, he heard a young lion roaring.

Jdg 14:6 Suddenly the power of the LORD made Samson strong, and he tore the lion apart with his bare hands, as if it were a young goat. But he did not tell his parents what he had done.

Jdg 14:7 Then he went and talked to the young woman, and he liked her.

Jdg 14:8 A few days later Samson went back to marry her. On the way he left the road to look at the lion he had killed, and he was surprised to find a swarm of bees and some honey inside the dead body.

Jdg 14:9 He scraped the honey out into his hands and ate it as he walked along. Then he went to his father and

mother and gave them some. They ate it, but Samson did not tell them that he had taken the honey from the dead body of a lion.

Jdg 14:10 His father went to the woman's house, and Samson gave a banquet there. This was a custom among the young men.

Jdg 14:11 When the Philistines saw him, they sent thirty young men to stay with him.

Jdg 14:12 (12-13) Samson said to them, "Let me tell you a riddle. I'll bet each one of you a piece of fine linen and a change of fine clothes that you can't tell me its meaning before the seven days of the wedding feast are over." "Tell us your riddle," they said. "Let's hear it."

Jdg 14:14 He said, "Out of the eater came something to eat; Out of the strong came something sweet." Three days later they had still not figured out what the riddle meant.

Jdg 14:15 On the fourth day they said to Samson's wife, "Trick your husband into telling us what the riddle means. If you don't, we'll set fire to your father's house and burn you with it. You two invited us so that you could rob us, didn't you?"

Jdg 14:16 So Samson's wife went to him in tears and said, "You don't love me! You just hate me! You told my friends a riddle and didn't tell me what it means!" He said, "Look, I haven't even told my father and mother. Why should I tell you?"

Jdg 14:17 She cried about it for the whole seven days of the feast. But on the seventh day he told her what the riddle meant, for she nagged him so about it. Then she told the Philistines.

Jdg 14:18 So on the seventh day, before Samson went into the bedroom, the men of the city said to him, "What could be sweeter than honey? What could be stronger than a

lion?" Samson replied, "If you hadn't been plowing with my cow, You wouldn't know the answer now."

Jdg 14:19 Suddenly the power of the LORD made him strong, and he went down to Ashkelon, where he killed thirty men, stripped them, and gave their fine clothes to the men who had solved the riddle. After that, he went back home, furious about what had happened,

Jdg 14:20 and his wife was given to the man that had been his best man at the wedding.

## **Judges 14:1-20**

### **Judges 14 - Samson's First Failed Marriage**

#### **A. Samson seeks a Philistine wife.**

*1. (1-3) Samson demands a Philistine wife.*

**Now Samson went down to Timnah, and saw a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines. So he went up and told his father and mother, saying, "I have seen a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore, get her for me as a wife." Then his father and mother said to him, "Is there no woman among the daughters of your brethren, or among all my people, that you must go and get a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" And Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she pleases me well."**

a. **Saw a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines:** This seemed to be a case of "love at first sight" for Samson. He saw this woman and he instantly wanted to marry her.

i. **She pleases me well** is literally, "she is right in my eyes." What Samson really cared about was how things *looked* to himself, not how they looked to the LORD.

i. Love at first sight is a powerful, but dangerous thing. It is entirely possible for us to fall in love with someone that we have no business falling in love with – which was exactly the case with Samson here. As well, love at first sight feels wonderful, but doesn't last in its initial form forever. We can be attracted more to the *feeling of love* itself than the person we focus upon – whom we don't really know at first sight.

b. **Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she pleases me well"**: In demanding a Philistine wife, Samson showed a sinful disregard for his parents and for God's will (Deu 7:3-4). Bound by romantic feelings, there are many people who still demand from God a mate out of God's will.

i. "His parents attempted to dissuade him, but he allowed himself to be swept by his passion and determined to realize his own desires." (Morgan)

ii. The command to the Israelis to not intermarry with the pagan nations around them applies to the Christian today in that a Christian must not marry someone who is not a Christian, joining themselves together with an unbeliever (2Co 6:14).

iii. It isn't because those who are not Christians are not lovable - they are sometimes more lovable than believers. It is not because they aren't good enough, or worthy of our love, or that they are somehow inherently incapable of being a good marriage partner. It is simply because to be a Christian means Jesus Christ is the most important thing in your life; and when a Christian and a non-Christian get together, you have two people who disagree on the most important things in life.

iv. By extension, a Christian should never *date* a non-Christian. Those who do run a serious risk of falling in

love with someone they have no business falling in love with.

v. Additionally, a Christian is advised to carefully discern the Christian commitment of the one they are interested in. There have been many pretended conversions, calculated to merely entice a Christian to marriage.

vi. If someone goes against God's plan and marries an unbeliever or if someone becomes a Christian before their spouse, there are specific commands applying to their situation. The Apostle Paul clearly wrote that this one must do all that is possible to stay in the marriage, and be the best spouse they can be (1Co 7:10-16).

vii. God did use Samson mightily; but God used Samson *despite* his sin, not because of it. It is fair to suppose that God may have used Samson in a far greater way if he made himself a clean vessel according to the principle of 2Ti 2:20-21.

*2. (4) God's will behind the scenes of Samson's desire to marry a Philistine woman.*

**But his father and mother did not know that it was of the LORD; that He was seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines. For at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel.**

a. **His father and mother did not know that it was of the LORD:** As the rest of the chapter shows, some good ultimately came out of this ungodly marriage. Many Philistines were killed, and they were kept off balance in their attempts to dominate the Israelites.

i. However, *none* of that justified Samson's actions. Though God can make even the evil of man to serve His purposes, it never justifies the evil that man does.

**b. He was seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines:** In accomplishing this purpose, God did not *make* a reluctant Samson pursue the Philistine woman for marriage. God allowed Samson to do what he wanted to do, though the act itself was sinful. God allowed it for reasons in both Samson's life and for reasons on a larger scale.

i. Someone today might justify their desire to marry a non-Christian because they trust some good will come out of it – such as their non-Christian partner eventually coming to Jesus. Things may work out that way, but even though God used Samson's marriage to a Philistine woman, it all came at a great personal cost to Samson.

ii. No matter how much good God can bring out of even the bad things we do, He can always bring far more good out of our obedience - and we ourselves experience much less pain.

*3. (5-9) Samson slays a lion and eats some wild honey.*

**So Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother, and came to the vineyards of Timnah. Now *to his* surprise, a young lion *came* roaring against him. And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he tore the lion apart as one would have torn apart a young goat, though *he had* nothing in his hand. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done. Then he went down and talked with the woman; and she pleased Samson well. After some time, when he returned to get her, he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion. And behold, a swarm of bees and honey *were* in the carcass of the lion. He took some of it in his hands and went along, eating. When he came to his father and mother, he gave *some* to them, and they also ate. But he did not tell**

**them that he had taken the honey out of the carcass of the lion.**

a. **He came to the vineyards of Timnah:** Samson was dedicated to God with a lifelong vow of a Nazirite (Jdg 13:4-5). Nazirites were to have nothing to do with grape products in any form (Num 6:3-4). Samson was dangerously close to significant compromise.

b. **He tore the lion apart as one would have torn apart a young goat:** Though Samson flirted with compromise – both with his impending marriage and the **vineyards of Timnah** – he still had miraculous strength because **the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him.**

i. “If that roaring lion, that goes about continually seeking whom he may devour, find us alone among the vineyards of the Philistines, where is our hope? Not in our heels, he is swifter than we: not in our weapons, we are naturally unarmed: not in our hands, which are weak and languishing; but in the Spirit of God, by whom we can do all things. If God fight in us, who call resist us? There is a stronger lion in us than that against us.” (Spurgeon)

ii. The Holy Spirit of God wants to come upon us and give us power but power for something far more important than ripping apart lions. The Holy Spirit comes upon us for the empowering to live for God as we should and for the power to tell others about Jesus effectively.

c. **She pleased Samson well:** This does not mean that she was a good woman for Samson to be attracted to or to marry. It is possible to fall in love with someone who is actually very wrong for us. This is why Pro 4:23 says: *Keep (literally, guard or protect) your heart with all*



*diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.* If we don't guard our hearts, we can end up in trouble.

i. If we find that we are already in love with a wrong person, the only thing to do is to give them up, because it is right before God. Jesus told us that following Him would require that we give up the things we love most (Mar 10:29-30).

**d. He took some of it in his hands and went along:**

When Samson gathered honey from the dead carcass of a lion, he expressly violated his Nazirite vow, which stipulated that a Nazirite should never touch a dead body or carcass (Num 6:6-7).

i. Significantly, Samson did this *after* he was remarkably filled with the Holy Spirit. This shows that an outpouring of the Holy Spirit does not automatically make a person godlier. An outpouring of the Holy Spirit gives one the *resources* to be godlier, but it doesn't "do it to" them. A person can be wonderfully gifted by the Holy Spirit and yet very spiritually immature.

**e. He did not tell them that he had taken the honey out of the carcass of the lion:** Samson did not tell his parents where he got the honey because he knew it was a compromise of his Nazirite vow.

i. Samson had *consecration* (at least the appearance of it) without *communion*. This was only good for the sake of image. The empty nature of his consecration would eventually be evident.

ii. In the killing of the lion and the sharing of the honey, Spurgeon saw a spiritual picture of the work of Jesus Christ for us: "And what a type we have here of our Divine Lord and Master. Jesus, the conqueror of death and hell. He has destroyed the lion that roared

upon us and upon him... I see our triumphant Lord laden with sweetness, holding it forth to all his brethren, and inviting them to share in his joy.” (Spurgeon)

iii. In the same way, Samson *shared* the sweetness of his victory over the lion with others. Spurgeon pointed out that this is, by analogy, a pattern for the way we should share the gospel.

- Samson brought the honey first to those nearest to him.
- Samson brought the honey in his hands, in the simplest way available to him.
- Samson actually gave them some of the honey to taste.
- Samson brought the honey modestly, not boasting about killing the lion.

## **B. The feast and the riddle.**

1. (10-11) *Samson hosts a “bachelor party” for Philistine friends.*

**So his father went down to the woman. And Samson gave a feast there, for young men used to do so. And it happened, when they saw him, that they brought thirty companions to be with him.**

a. **Samson gave a feast there:** Literally, this was a *drinking feast*. If Samson didn’t break his Nazirite vow by partaking in the wine, he certainly put himself in a situation where it would be easy to do so.

b. **They brought thirty companions to be with him:** It was not – and is not – difficult to get many people to be part of a *drinking feast*.

2. (12-14) *Samson poses a riddle concerning the lion and the honey.*

**Then Samson said to them, "Let me pose a riddle to you. If you can correctly solve and explain it to me within the seven days of the feast, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing. But if you cannot explain *it* to me, then you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing." And they said to him, "Pose your riddle, that we may hear it." So he said to them:**

**"Out of the eater came something to eat,  
And out of the strong came something sweet."**

**Now for three days they could not explain the riddle.**

a. **Changes of clothing:** This literally describes a fine suit of clothes one would wear to an important occasion; therefore 30 fine suits were wagered. Like most betting, this "friendly wager" would turn into something not quite so friendly.

b. **Out of the eater came something to eat:** This was a clever riddle, and Samson showed that even if he was weak morally he was not weak intellectually.

3. (15-18) *Samson's Philistine wife extracts the answer to the riddle from Samson and tells it to the Philistines.*

**But it came to pass on the seventh day that they said to Samson's wife, "Entice your husband, that he may explain the riddle to us, or else we will burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us in order to take what is ours? *Is that not so?* " Then Samson's wife wept on him, and said, "You only hate me! You do not love me! You have posed a riddle to the sons of my people, but you have not explained *it* to me." And he said to her, "Look, I have not explained *it* to my father or my mother; so should I**

**explain *it* to you?” Now she had wept on him the seven days while their feast lasted. And it happened on the seventh day that he told her, because she pressed him so much. Then she explained the riddle to the sons of her people. So the men of the city said to him on the seventh day before the sun went down:**

**“What *is* sweeter than honey?  
And what *is* stronger than a lion?”**

**And he said to them:**

**“If you had not plowed with my heifer,  
You would not have solved my riddle!”**

**a. Then Samson’s wife wept on him, and said, “You only hate me! You do not love me”:** Samson’s Philistine wife knew how to manipulate the situation and how to make herself a burden to her husband until she got what she wanted from him.

i. Some wives will make themselves a burden to their husbands until they get what they want. This tactic is used because it often works in the short term; but it can poison the relationship and ends up costing more than it gains.

**b. He told her, because she pressed him so much:** A woman easily manipulated the world’s strongest man. This weakness of Samson will later be the cause of his downfall.

i. The willingness of Samson’s Philistine wife to side with her people against Samson shows a fundamental weakness in their marriage. She did not fulfill the idea essential to marriage of leaving one’s father and mother to be joined in a one flesh relationship to their spouse (Gen 2:24; Mat 19:5). Yet this also shows why it was wrong for Samson to marry a Philistine.

We cannot expect someone who does not love the God of Israel to build a marriage on God's principles.

ii. However, we see that the reason Samson's wife cooperated against her husband was also somewhat complicated. She acted out of fear because of their threat (**else we will burn you and your father's house with fire**). If she told Samson about the threats, he could have more than handled the situation. She apparently did not feel safe with Samson, but he was her best safety.

c. **If you had not plowed with my heifer, You would not have solved my riddle:** Samson's use of this proverb showed the anger and bitterness he felt at being manipulated. Samson's wife "won" what she wanted through manipulation, but she lost her husband's heart.

i. When a man gives in to his wife's manipulations so as to keep peace, it almost always builds anger and resentment in the man – and guilt in the woman for what she did. The way of manipulation is tempting (because it works), but always brings real destruction.

#### 4. (19-20) *Samson's anger and revenge.*

**Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of their men, took their apparel, and gave the changes of *clothing* to those who had explained the riddle. So his anger was aroused, and he went back up to his father's house. And Samson's wife was *given* to his companion, who had been his best man.**

a. **Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily:** The Spirit of the LORD did not come upon Samson to avenge the hurt feelings of a husband. God's strategy was larger: *He was seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines (Jdg\_14:4)*. Therefore, He used

this occasion to pour out His Spirit on Samson to fight against the Philistines.

**b. Killed thirty of their men, took their apparel, and gave the changes of clothing to those who had explained the riddle:** Samson paid off the bet, but he did it at the expense of the Philistines. He killed thirty of these enemies of Israel and gave their garments to satisfy the debt.

**c. Samson's wife was given to his companion, who had been his best man:** Samson won the battle but lost the war. His wife left him and went to his best man. It is interesting to think what Samson and his wife might say if they went in for marriage counseling.

i. What Samson might say to a marriage counselor: *I love my wife, but it seems that we are not moving in the same direction. All I hear is nag, nag, nag; I finally do what she nags me to do, but by then I'm angry and the situation is worse than ever. I need to feel that she supports me, and that she's on my side. I think she wants to give up on the marriage if she hasn't already.*

ii. What Samson's wife might say to a marriage counselor: *My husband is a good guy, but he does not meet my needs. It was love at first sight for us, but now things have gone downhill. There are things I need him to do and to be that he just can't or won't. He doesn't respond to my needs and then we just get into a big fight, and no one is happy. I wonder if he loves me anymore.*

iii. Samson was at fault for not guarding his heart against falling in love with a woman he had no business falling in love with. He was at fault for not founding the marriage on God's principles. He was

also at fault for not responding to his wife's manipulations with love, free from anger.

iv. At the same time, Samson's wife was at fault for siding with others against her husband. She was at fault for not telling her husband what the real problem was. And she was at fault for manipulating her husband by being such a bother until she got her way. Most of all, she was at fault for *giving up on the marriage*. Samson didn't leave her; she left him. No matter what the problems in a relationship, what God commands us most of all is to not give up on the marriage.

v. We might rightly say with Charles Spurgeon: "Samson himself is a riddle. He was not only a riddle-maker; but he was himself an enigma very difficult to explain." (Spurgeon)

### **Samson Defeats the Philistines**

**Jdg 15:1** Some time later Samson went to visit his wife during the wheat harvest and took her a young goat. He told her father, "I want to go to my wife's room." But he wouldn't let him go in.

Jdg 15:2 He told Samson, "I really thought that you hated her, so I gave her to your friend. But her younger sister is prettier, anyway. You can have her, instead."

Jdg 15:3 Samson said, "This time I'm not going to be responsible for what I do to the Philistines!"

Jdg 15:4 So he went and caught three hundred foxes. Two at a time, he tied their tails together and put torches in the knots.

Jdg 15:5 Then he set fire to the torches and turned the foxes loose in the Philistine wheat fields. In this way he burned up not only the wheat that had been harvested but

also the wheat that was still in the fields. The olive orchards were also burned.

Jdg 15:6 When the Philistines asked who had done this, they learned that Samson had done it because his father-in-law, a man from Timnah, had given Samson's wife to a friend of Samson's. So the Philistines went and burned the woman to death and burned down her father's house.

Jdg 15:7 Samson told them, "So this is how you act! I swear that I won't stop until I pay you back!"

Jdg 15:8 He attacked them fiercely and killed many of them. Then he went and stayed in the cave in the cliff at Etam.

Jdg 15:9 The Philistines came and camped in Judah, and attacked the town of Lehi.

Jdg 15:10 The men of Judah asked them, "Why are you attacking us?" They answered, "We came to take Samson prisoner and to treat him as he treated us."

Jdg 15:11 So these three thousand men of Judah went to the cave in the cliff at Etam and said to Samson, "Don't you know that the Philistines are our rulers? What have you done to us?" He answered, "I did to them just what they did to me."

Jdg 15:12 They told him, "We have come here to tie you up, so we can hand you over to them." Samson said, "Give me your word that you won't kill me yourselves."

Jdg 15:13 "All right," they said, "we are only going to tie you up and hand you over to them. We won't kill you." So they tied him up with two new ropes and brought him back from the cliff.

Jdg 15:14 When he got to Lehi, the Philistines came running toward him, shouting at him. Suddenly the power of the LORD made him strong, and he broke the ropes around his arms and hands as if they were burnt thread.



Jdg 15:15 Then he found a jawbone of a donkey that had recently died. He reached down and picked it up, and killed a thousand men with it.

Jdg 15:16 So Samson sang, "With the jawbone of a donkey I killed a thousand men; With the jawbone of a donkey I piled them up in piles."

Jdg 15:17 After that, he threw the jawbone away. The place where this happened was named Ramath Lehi.

Jdg 15:18 Then Samson became very thirsty, so he called to the LORD and said, "You gave me this great victory; am I now going to die of thirst and be captured by these heathen Philistines?"

Jdg 15:19 Then God opened a hollow place in the ground there at Lehi, and water came out of it. Samson drank it and began to feel much better. So the spring was named Hakkore; it is still there at Lehi.

Jdg 15:20 Samson led Israel for twenty years while the Philistines ruled the land.

## **Judges 15:1-20**

### **Judges 15 - Samson Against the Philistines**

#### **A. Retaliation back and forth.**

*1. (1-3) Samson's rage at discovering that his wife is given to another.*

**After a while, in the time of wheat harvest, it happened that Samson visited his wife with a young goat. And he said, "Let me go in to my wife, into *her* room." But her father would not permit him to go in. Her father said, "I really thought that you thoroughly hated her; therefore I gave her to your companion. *Is* not her younger sister better than she? Please, take her instead." And Samson said to them, "This time I**

**shall be blameless regarding the Philistines if I harm them!"**

**a. I really thought that you thoroughly hated her:**

It's hard to know why Samson's father-in-law thought that Samson hated his wife. Perhaps this was just an excuse to explain why he did what he did; or perhaps Samson's Philistine wife poisoned her father's opinion of Samson (Jdg 14:16).

**b. Samson said to them:** Even though Samson was angry with his wife's father, the real root of the problem was the bad choices Samson made in love. He had no business allowing himself to fall in love with an ungodly, pagan woman.

i. No wonder Pro 4:23 tells us: *Keep (literally, guard or protect) your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.* Failure to guard our heart can result in great trouble.

**c. This time I shall be blameless regarding the Philistines if I harm them:** God used Samson's ungodly anger for His purposes. As Psa 76:10 says, *Surely the wrath of man shall praise You.* This doesn't justify Samson's anger, but it shows the glory and power of God to use all things to His purposes.

2. (4-5) *Samson strikes out against the Philistines by burning their crops.*

**Then Samson went and caught three hundred foxes; and he took torches, turned *the foxes* tail to tail, and put a torch between each pair of tails. When he had set the torches on fire, he let *the foxes* go into the standing grain of the Philistines, and burned up both the shocks and the standing grain, as well as the vineyards *and* olive groves.**

a. **Samson went and caught three hundred foxes:** Samson seemed to act like a juvenile delinquent. Yet God used it all for His purpose of fighting against the Philistines.

b. **Put a torch between each pair of tails:** Some object that Samson could not have captured 300 foxes. Yet the word translated **foxes** probably refers to a jackal, not a fox, and jackals are known to run in large packs, sometimes up to 200. Second, there is nothing that says Samson did this all by himself. Third, there is nothing that says he did it all in one day.

3. (6-7) *The Philistines retaliate by killing Samson's wife and family.*

**Then the Philistines said, "Who has done this?" And they answered, "Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he has taken his wife and given her to his companion." So the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire. Samson said to them, "Since you would do a thing like this, I will surely take revenge on you, and after that I will cease."**

a. **So the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire:** God used all this to advance His plan for Israel and redemption. Yet because of Samson's disobedience, it all happened at great personal cost to Samson. It is fair to suppose that if Samson were obedient, God would have furthered His plan in a way that *blessed* Samson.

b. **I will surely take revenge on you, and after that I will cease:** We have here the bitter story of retaliation - of trying to avenge wrongs done to us. Retaliation is a never-ending story, and one that never wins in the end. Those who trust in God must be able to say, "Retaliation belongs to God. I'll let Him settle the score."

i. Much of the war, disaster, deep-seated hatred, and pain in our world come from this instinct to retaliate. But Jesus told us to not retaliate an eye for an eye, but to take control of the situation by giving even more (Mat 5:38-42). When we do this, we act like God, who did not retaliate against man for his sin and rebellion, but instead gave His only Son to die for man.

4. (8) *Samson repays the Philistines for the murder of his wife.*

**So he attacked them hip and thigh with a great slaughter; then he went down and dwelt in the cleft of the rock of Etam.**

a. **He attacked them hip and thigh:** This is an expression for a cruel, unsparing slaughter. Samson was a one-man army against the Philistines.

b. **Dwelt in the cleft of the rock of Etam:** Samson had no more family and could trust virtually no one. He lived like a fugitive, alone in a cave.

## **B. Samson slays one thousand Philistines.**

1. (9-13) *Judah surrenders Samson to the Philistines.*

**Now the Philistines went up, encamped in Judah, and deployed themselves against Lehi. And the men of Judah said, "Why have you come up against us?" So they answered, "We have come up to arrest Samson, to do to him as he has done to us." Then three thousand men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam, and said to Samson, "Do you not know that the Philistines rule over us? What *is* this you have done to us?" And he said to them, "As they did to me, so I have done to them." But they said to him, "We have come down to arrest you, that we may deliver you into the hand of the Philistines." Then**

**Samson said to them, “Swear to me that you will not kill me yourselves.” So they spoke to him, saying, “No, but we will tie you securely and deliver you into their hand; but we will surely not kill you.” And they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock.**

**a. We have come up to arrest Samson, to do to him as he has done to us:** The fact that soldiers from the tribe of Judah gave up Samson to the Philistines shows just how much they were under the oppression of the Philistines. They would rather *please their oppressors* than *support their deliverer*.

i. This is a strangely common phenomenon. Often, when someone stands up to evil, people are angrier at the one who stood up to the evil than they are angry at the evil itself.

**b. Do you not know that the Philistines rule over us:** Samson didn’t want to hear this or recognize it. As far as he was concerned, the Philistines *should not* rule over the people of God.

**c. They bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock:** It seems that Samson submitted to this. Assuming this was true; it showed great faith on Samson’s part. He was willing to put himself in a difficult position and to trust God to take care of him.

*2. (14-17) Samson uses the jawbone of a donkey to kill a thousand Philistines.*

**When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting against him. Then the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him; and the ropes that were on his arms became like flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds broke loose from his hands. He found a fresh**

**jawbone of a donkey, reached out his hand and took it, and killed a thousand men with it. Then Samson said:**

**“With the jawbone of a donkey,  
Heaps upon heaps,  
With the jawbone of a donkey  
I have slain a thousand men!”**

**And so it was, when he had finished speaking, that he threw the jawbone from his hand, and called that place Ramath Lehi.**

**a. He found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, reached out his hand and took it, and killed a thousand men with it:** Samson was unique among the judges because he was a “one-man army” against the Philistines. Other Judges of Israel led *armies* against their enemies, but Samson fought alone.

i. With this remarkable victory, “We are conscious of what he might have done had he been wholly yielded to that ‘Spirit of Jehovah’ who came mightily upon him, instead of being so largely governed by the fires of his own passion.” (Morgan)

**b. With the jawbone of a donkey, heaps upon heaps:** Samson’s bold declaration of victory has a poetic touch that is difficult to render in translation. One effort goes like this: “With the jawbone of an ass I have piled them in a mass!”

**c. And called that place Ramath Lehi:** This name essentially means “Jawbone Hill.” It was an obviously appropriate name for this place of Samson’s great victory.

i. One preacher came up with a five-point sermon on the jawbone of an ass, likening it to the weapon of the gospel:

- *It was a novel weapon.*
- *It was a most convenient weapon.*
- *It was a simple weapon.*

- *It was a ridiculous weapon.*
- *It was a successful weapon.*

3. (18-20) *God provides for Samson miraculously.*

**Then he became very thirsty; so he cried out to the LORD and said, "You have given this great deliverance by the hand of Your servant; and now shall I die of thirst and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?" So God split the hollow place that *is* in Lehi, and water came out, and he drank; and his spirit returned, and he revived. Therefore he called its name En Hakkore, which is in Lehi to this day. And he judged Israel twenty years in the days of the Philistines.**

a. **Then he became very thirsty:** Samson needed this thirst to remind himself of his own weakness and need right after such a great victory. After a great victory we need to remember our mortality.

i. *"It is very usual for God's people, when they have had some great deliverance, to have some little trouble that is too much for them. Samson slays a thousand Philistines, and piles them up in heaps, and then he must needs die for want of a little water!"* (Spurgeon)

ii. Matthew Poole comments on Samson's great thirst: it was "partly sent by God, that by the experience of his own impotency he might be forced to ascribe the victory to God only, and not to himself."

b. **God split the hollow place that is in Lehi, and water came out, and he drank; and his spirit returned, and he revived:** This is an example of the principle that God's work, done God's way, will always be provided for by God. Here the LORD showed His



faithfulness to Samson by supplying the needs of His servant.

i. In his sermon *The Fainting Hero*, Charles Spurgeon pointed out that the believer can look at *heaps upon heaps* of defeated enemies: Heaps of your sins, heaps of your doubts and fears, heaps of our temptations, heaps of many of your sorrows. Yet, despite all these victories, fresh challenges will come, even as a deadly thirst and fatigue overcame Samson. Through this all, Samson could count on the fact that the

*past victory was a promise of future deliverance.*

ii. "With that simple minded faith which was so characteristic of Samson, who was nothing but a big child, he turned his eye to his heavenly Father, and cried, 'O Jehovah, thou hast given me this great deliverance, and now shall I die for thirst? After all that thou hast done for me, shall the uncircumcised rejoice over me because I die for want of a drink of water?' Such confidence had he, that God would interpose on his behalf." (Spurgeon)

iii. "Be of good courage, fainting warrior! The God who made thee, and has used thee, knows thy frame, and what thou needest before thou askest." (Meyer)

## **Samson and Delilah**

**Jdg 16:1** One day Samson went to the Philistine city of Gaza, where he met a prostitute and went to bed with her.

Jdg 16:2 The people of Gaza found out that Samson was there, so they surrounded the place and waited for him all night long at the city gate. They were quiet all night, thinking to themselves, "We'll wait until daybreak, and then we'll kill him."

Jdg 16:3 But Samson stayed in bed only until midnight. Then he got up and took hold of the city gate and pulled it

up—doors, posts, lock, and all. He put them on his shoulders and carried them far off to the top of the hill overlooking Hebron.

Jdg 16:4 After this, Samson fell in love with a woman named Delilah, who lived in Sorek Valley.

Jdg 16:5 The five Philistine kings went to her and said, "Trick Samson into telling you why he is so strong and how we can overpower him, tie him up, and make him helpless. Each one of us will give you eleven hundred pieces of silver."

Jdg 16:6 So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me what makes you so strong. If someone wanted to tie you up and make you helpless, how could he do it?"

Jdg 16:7 Samson answered, "If they tie me up with seven new bowstrings that are not dried out, I'll be as weak as anybody else."

Jdg 16:8 So the Philistine kings brought Delilah seven new bowstrings that were not dried out, and she tied Samson up.

Jdg 16:9 She had some men waiting in another room, so she shouted, "Samson! The Philistines are coming!" But he snapped the bowstrings just as thread breaks when fire touches it. So they still did not know the secret of his strength.

Jdg 16:10 Delilah told Samson, "Look, you've been making a fool of me and not telling me the truth. Please tell me how someone could tie you up."

Jdg 16:11 He told her, "If they tie me with new ropes that have never been used, I'll be as weak as anybody else."

Jdg 16:12 So Delilah got some new ropes and tied him up. Then she shouted, "Samson! The Philistines are coming!" The men were waiting in another room. But he snapped the ropes off his arms like thread.

Jdg 16:13 Delilah said to Samson, "You're still making a fool of me and not telling me the truth. Tell me how someone could tie you up." He told her, "If you weave my seven locks of hair into a loom, and make it tight with a peg, I'll be as weak as anybody else."

Jdg 16:14 Delilah then lulled him to sleep, took his seven locks of hair, and wove them into the loom. She made it tight with a peg and shouted, "Samson! The Philistines are coming!" But he woke up and pulled his hair loose from the loom.

Jdg 16:15 So she said to him, "How can you say you love me, when you don't mean it? You've made a fool of me three times, and you still haven't told me what makes you so strong."

Jdg 16:16 She kept on asking him, day after day. He got so sick and tired of her bothering him about it

Jdg 16:17 that he finally told her the truth. "My hair has never been cut," he said. "I have been dedicated to God as a nazirite from the time I was born. If my hair were cut, I would lose my strength and be as weak as anybody else."

Jdg 16:18 When Delilah realized that he had told her the truth, she sent a message to the Philistine kings and said, "Come back one more time. He has told me the truth." Then they came and brought the money with them.

Jdg 16:19 Delilah lulled Samson to sleep in her lap and then called a man, who cut off Samson's seven locks of hair. Then she began to torment him, for he had lost his strength.

Jdg 16:20 Then she shouted, "Samson! The Philistines are coming!" He woke up and thought, "I'll get loose and go free, as always." He did not know that the LORD had left him.

Jdg 16:21 The Philistines captured him and put his eyes out. They took him to Gaza, chained him with bronze

chains, and put him to work grinding at the mill in the prison.

Jdg 16:22 But his hair started growing back.

### **The Death of Samson**

Jdg 16:23 The Philistine kings met together to celebrate and offer a great sacrifice to their god Dagon. They sang, "Our god has given us victory over our enemy Samson!"

Jdg 16:24 (24-25) They were enjoying themselves, and so they said, "Call Samson, and let's make him entertain us!" When they brought Samson out of the prison, they made him entertain them and made him stand between the columns. When the people saw him, they sang praise to their god: "Our god has given us victory over our enemy, who devastated our land and killed so many of us!"

Jdg 16:26 Samson said to the boy who was leading him by the hand, "Let me touch the columns that hold up the building. I want to lean on them."

Jdg 16:27 The building was crowded with men and women. All five Philistine kings were there, and there were about three thousand men and women on the roof, watching Samson entertain them.

Jdg 16:28 Then Samson prayed, "Sovereign LORD, please remember me; please, God, give me my strength just this one time more, so that with this one blow I can get even with the Philistines for putting out my two eyes."

Jdg 16:29 So Samson took hold of the two middle columns holding up the building. Putting one hand on each column, he pushed against them

Jdg 16:30 and shouted, "Let me die with the Philistines!" He pushed with all his might, and the building fell down on the five kings and everyone else. Samson killed more people at his death than he had killed during his life.

Jdg 16:31 His brothers and the rest of his family came down to get his body. They took him back and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of his father Manoah. He had been Israel's leader for twenty years.

## **Judges 16:1-31**

### **Judges 16 - Samson's Disgrace and Death**

#### **A. Samson and Delilah.**

*1. (1-3) Samson and the harlot at Gaza.*

**Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her. *When the Gazites were told, "Samson has come here!" they surrounded the place and lay in wait for him all night at the gate of the city. They were quiet all night, saying, "In the morning, when it is daylight, we will kill him."* And Samson lay *low* till midnight; then he arose at midnight, took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two gateposts, pulled them up, bar and all, put *them* on his shoulders, and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron.**

a. **Saw a harlot there, and went in to her:** Samson was in obvious sin here. This is a clear example of how a man so used of God can also sin and sin blatantly.

i. Samson wanted to be used by God, but he also yielded to the deceitfulness of sin. He kept the external features of his Nazirite vow zealously, while at the same time sinning blatantly with a prostitute.

ii. Samson did what we nearly all do when deceived by sin. He put his life into categories, and figured that some categories God cared about, and some categories God did not care about. Understanding that Jesus has claim over our entire life is a radical change of perspective.

b. **Put them on his shoulders, and carried them to the top of the hill:** Despite his sin, God still gave Samson supernatural strength to escape from the Philistines. God did this because God's purpose was bigger than Samson himself, and because God used Samson *despite* Samson's sin, not because of it.

2. (4-5) *Delilah agrees to betray Samson.*

**Afterward it happened that he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, "Entice him, and find out where his great strength *lies*, and by what *means* we may overpower him, that we may bind him to afflict him; and every one of us will give you eleven hundred *pieces* of silver."**

a. **He loved a woman... whose name was Delilah:** Samson fell in love again and fell for a woman completely wrong for him. This is another example of the pain and ruin that came into Samson's life because he did not guard his heart.

b. **Every one of us will give you eleven hundred pieces of silver:** Delilah was also deeply in love; but she was in love with money, not Samson. 1,100 shekels made up more than 140 pounds (63 kilograms) of silver.

3. (6-9) *Samson lies to Delilah about the source of his strength.*

**So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me where your great strength *lies*, and with what you may be bound to afflict you." And Samson said to her, "If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings, not yet dried, then I shall become weak, and be like any *other* man." So the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh bowstrings, not yet dried, and she bound him with them. Now *men* were lying in wait, staying with**

her in the room. And she said to him, “The Philistines *are upon you, Samson!*” But he broke the bowstrings as a strand of yarn breaks when it touches fire. So the secret of his strength was not known.

a. **Please tell me where your great strength lies:**

The source of Samson’s strength was not obvious. This means that he probably was not a large, heavily muscled man like a modern-day bodybuilder. He may have looked small and skinny, and unlikely to have such strength.

b. **And with what you may be bound to afflict you:**

Delilah knew that Samson was strong; yet she also knew that *he could be bound with something*, and this was indeed true of Samson. One might say that the honest answer to her question would be, “I may be bound with the attention and affection of an ungodly yet attractive woman.”

c. **And she bound him:** Samson could have easily seen Delilah’s heart by the way she immediately tried to bind him with what he deceptively said he could be bound with. The fact that he did not tell her the truth *proved* that he knew she had a dangerous intention.

4. (10-12) *Samson lies to Delilah about the source of his strength a second time.*

**Then Delilah said to Samson, “Look, you have mocked me and told me lies. Now, please tell me what you may be bound with.” So he said to her, “If they bind me securely with new ropes that have never been used, then I shall become weak, and be like any *other* man.” Therefore Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them, and said to him, “The Philistines *are upon you, Samson!*” And *men were lying in wait*, staying in the room. But he broke them off his arms like a thread.**

a. **Now, please tell me what you may be bound with:** It would seem that romantic attraction made Samson lose all sense. There was no good or rational reason Samson continued this relationship with Delilah or entertained her prying into the secret of his strength. Samson is a good example of how an ungodly relationship can warp thinking.

b. **Delilah took new ropes and bound him:** Samson allowed this bondage because he refused to escape the situation. Many today are in similar places of sin, compromise, and bondage - and refuse to escape the situation.

5. (13-15) *Samson lies to Delilah about the source of his strength for the third time.*

**Delilah said to Samson, "Until now you have mocked me and told me lies. Tell me what you may be bound with." And he said to her, "If you weave the seven locks of my head into the web of the loom"; so she wove *it* tightly with the batten of the loom, and said to him, "The Philistines *are* upon you, Samson!" But he awoke from his sleep, and pulled out the batten and the web from the loom. Then she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart *is* not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and have not told me where your great strength *lies* ."**

a. **Tell me what you may be bound with:** Delilah obviously cared nothing for Samson. His continued commitment to her is a remarkable testimony to the power of blind, irresponsible love.

b. **How can you say, "I love you," when your heart is not with me:** Tragically, Samson's heart *was* **with** Delilah. Her accusation was a manipulative projection of her own heart, which was not **with** Samson.



6. (16-19) *Samson finally betrays the source of his strength.*

**And it came to pass, when she pestered him daily with her words and pressed him, so that his soul was vexed to death, that he told her all his heart, and said to her, "No razor has ever come upon my head, for I *have been* a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I am shaven, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak, and be like any *other* man." When Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, "Come up once more, for he has told me all his heart." So the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hand. Then she lulled him to sleep on her knees, and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him.**

a. **When she pestered him daily with her words and pressed him, so that his soul was vexed to death, that he told her all his heart:** Earlier Samson gave into the nagging of his Philistine wife (Jdg 14:15-18). Now he yielded to the nagging of Delilah. She certainly sinned by using such terrible manipulation, but Samson also sinned by yielding to that manipulation.

i. Her previous complaint that Samson's love for her was empty was a hollow protest. Delilah had no love for him, and she expected Samson to destroy himself and his service for God to "prove" his love for her.

b. **He told her all his heart:** When Samson did this, it was a very sad scene. He had to know what was to come. He faced the choice between faithfulness to his God and continuing an ungodly relationship.

i. In this we see the strongest man in the world weak under the power of an ungodly relationship. Perhaps

Samson figured that because he was strong in one area of his life, he was strong in all areas. In this he was desperately wrong.

c. **Then she lulled him to sleep on her knees:** No doubt, Delilah used sweet words to lull Samson to sleep. Her pretended love for Samson for the sake of money is deeply troubling.

i. "As long as he is consecrated he is strong; break that, he is weak as water. Now there are a thousand razors with which the devil can shave off the locks of a consecrated man without his knowing it. Samson is sound asleep; so clever is the barber that he even lulls him to sleep as his fingers move across the pate, the fool's pate, which he is making bare. The devil is cleverer far than even the skillful-barber; he can shave the believer's locks while he scarcely knows it." (Spurgeon)

d. **Then she began to torment him:** This was fitting. We might say that Delilah **began to torment** Samson long before this.

e. **And his strength left him:** There was nothing magical in Samson's hair. We might also say that Samson began breaking his Nazirite vow before this. Yet there came a time when Samson finally had to reckon with his rejection of God's mercy.

i. "Not that his hair made him strong, but that his hair was the symbol of his consecration, and was the pledge of God's favor to him. While his hair was untouched he was a consecrated man; as soon as that was cut away, he was no longer perfectly consecrated, and then his strength departed from him." (Spurgeon)

ii. "In the opinion of some persons Samson looked much improved when his matted hair was gone. He was more presentable; more fit for good society. And so in the case of churches, the notion is that they are all the better for getting rid of their peculiarities." (Spurgeon)

## **B. Samson's arrest and death.**

1. (20) *Samson is seized by the Philistines.*

**And she said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" So he awoke from his sleep, and said, "I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!" But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him.**

a. **I will go out as before:** Samson didn't know things were different. He lived in compromise for so long that he thought it would never make a difference.

i. "The story is one to fill the soul with holy fear. The possibility of going on in an attempt to do the work of God after God has withdrawn Himself, is an appalling one." (Morgan)

ii. This is a tragic example of wasted potential and rejection of God's warnings. Samson thought he could "get away" with sin and escape its consequences. He misinterpreted the merciful delay of God's judgment or correction as a sign that He really didn't care. He therefore presumed on God's mercy and continued on in his sin, making things far worse.

b. **He did not know that the LORD had departed from him:** Samson's strength was not in his hair, it was in his relationship with God. He worked against that relationship to the point where God finally **departed from him**, in the sense that He no longer blessed Samson with supernatural strength.

2. (21-22) *Samson's Philistine imprisonment.*

**Then the Philistines took him and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza. They bound him with bronze fetters, and he became a grinder in the prison. However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaven.**

a. **Then the Philistines took him and put out his eyes:** It was fitting that Samson was first blinded in his imprisonment. He was attracted to ungodly relationships through his eyes. His failure to restrain this attraction to women brought him into bondage.

b. **They bound him with bronze fetters:** Samson didn't humble himself in obedience before God - he insisted on the "freedom" of doing what he wanted to do. This left him with no freedom at all.

i. "There is nothing perhaps in the sacred writings at once more pathetic and tragic than the vision of Samson with his eyes put out, grinding in the prison house of the Philistines. It is a picture and a parable needing no enforcement of exposition to make it powerful." (Morgan)

ii. Sin has its wages, and this was Samson's payday. His sin left him blind, in bondage, and a slave. Before Samson's blindness, bondage, and slavery were only inward, but they eventually became evident outwardly.

c. **The hair of his head began to grow again:** God gave Samson hope in the midst of a dungeon. His hair began to return, and we can suppose that his heart also began to return.

i. "I wonder why these Philistines did not take care to keep his hair from growing to any length. If cutting his hair once had proved so effectual, I wonder that

they did not send in the barber every morning, to make sure that not a hair grew upon his scalp or chin. But wicked men are not in all matters wise men: indeed, they so conspicuously fail in one point or another that Scripture calls them fools." (Spurgeon)

ii. "When Samson's hair began to grow, what did it prophesy? Well, first, it prophesied *hope for Samson*. I will be bound to say that he put his hand to his head, and felt that it was getting bristly, and then he put his hand to his beard, and found it rough. Yes, yes, yes, it was coming, and he thought within himself, 'It will be all right soon. I shall not get my eyes back. *They* will not grow again. I am an awful loser by my sin, but I shall get my strength back again, for my hair is growing. I shall be able to strike a blow for my people and for my God yet.'" (Spurgeon)

3. (23-25) *Samson is mocked by his enemies.*

**Now the lords of the Philistines gathered together to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice. And they said:**

**"Our god has delivered into our hands  
Samson our enemy!"**

**When the people saw him, they praised their god; for they said:**

**"Our god has delivered into our hands our enemy,  
The destroyer of our land,  
And the one who multiplied our dead."**

**So it happened, when their hearts were merry, that they said, "Call for Samson, that he may perform for us." So they called for Samson from the prison, and he performed for them. And they stationed him between the pillars.**

a. **Our god has delivered into our hands Samson our enemy:** When Samson pursued his ungodly relationships, he might have justified it to himself by thinking that the only harm was done to himself. Yet here we see that his disobedience led to giving glory to false gods. Samson became a trophy for worshippers of false gods.

b. **When the people saw him, they praised their god:** The message preached by the followers of Dagon was clear. They said, "Our god is stronger than the God of Israel, because we have conquered Samson." Often the disobedience of God's leaders leads others to deny God.

#### *4. (26-31) Samson's bittersweet death.*

**Then Samson said to the lad who held him by the hand, "Let me feel the pillars which support the temple, so that I can lean on them." Now the temple was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there; about three thousand men and women on the roof watching while Samson performed. Then Samson called to the LORD, saying, "O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one *blow* take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!" And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars which supported the temple, and he braced himself against them, one on his right and the other on his left. Then Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" And he pushed with *all his* might, and the temple fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead that he killed at his death were more than he had killed in his life. And his brothers and all his father's household came down and took him, and brought *him* up and buried him between Zorah and**

**Eshtaol in the tomb of his father Manoah. He had judged Israel twenty years.**

a. **Samson said to the lad who held him by the hand:** The Philistines continued to mock Samson. At this large demonstration, they used a boy to guard him.

i. This makes us think all the more that Samson was not a muscle-bound man who was naturally strong. His strength was truly supernatural, not natural.

b. **That I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines:** Samson's end was both bitter and sweet. God answered his last prayer, and he achieved his greatest victory against the Philistines at the cost of his own life.

i. In this Samson is a picture of the believer in disobedience. God used him, but he did not benefit from it. His life ended in personal tragedy, shadowed by the waste of great potential.

c. **Let me die with the Philistines:** This was suicide, but different from suicide in the strict sense in that his purpose really wasn't to kill himself, but to kill as many Philistines as he could. There is a sense in which Samson was like modern suicide-bombers.

i. Samson was a hero, even mentioned among the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 (Heb 11:32). Yet there is no glorification of Samson and his end; he was not a *glorious* hero to be emulated, as modern suicide bombers are glorified by some. Instead, Samson was a *tragic* hero, whose life *should have ended* much differently.

ii. We can also say that Samson's suicide and killing of others was not sought out; the opportunity *came to him* tragically.

iii. Suicide is clearly sin, the sin of self-murder. Yet we are wrong if we regard it as the unforgivable sin. Most all who commit suicide have given in to the lies and deceptions of Satan, whose purpose is to kill and destroy (Joh 10:10).

**d. And he pushed with all his might, and the temple fell on the lords and all the people who were in it:**

This could only happen with God supernaturally empowering Samson. This shows that God never forsook Samson, even when he was disobedient. God's mercies were there for Samson even in a Philistine prison. All Samson had to do was to turn his heart back towards God and receive them.

i. We could say that Samson was restored with self-renunciation. This last great victory came only as he was broken, humiliated, and blind. He could no longer look to himself. Prior to this we don't see Samson as a man of prayer, but here he prayed. He was humbled enough to allow a little boy to help him.

ii. In summary, Samson shows the danger of underestimating our own sinfulness. He probably figured he had things under control with his own fleshly lusts, but his desire for love, romance, and sex led directly to his destruction. Samson was the great conqueror who never allowed God to properly conquer him.

iii. Samson *had* to be deceived to keep going back to tempting and dangerous places. It seemed that just about every time he went to the land of the Philistines, he fell into moral compromise. He should have learned from this. Instead of putting himself in tempting situations, he should have fled from youthful lusts (2Ti 2:22) like Joseph did (Gen 39:12). "Rather



than break his relationship with Delilah, he allowed it to break him.” (Wolf)

iv. Samson also shows the danger of being a loner as a leader. Everything Samson did he did alone. He judged for 20 years and never sought or used help from others.

v. Most of all, Samson is a powerful picture of wasted potential. He could have been and should have been one of the greatest men of God in the Old Testament; but he wasted his potential.

vi. “The Old Testament biographies were never written for our imitation, but they were written for our instruction. Upon this one matter, what a volume of force there is in such lessons! ‘See,’ says God, ‘what faith can do. Here is a man, full of infirmities, a sorry fool; yet, through his childlike faith, he lives. ‘The just shall live by faith.’ He has many sad flaws and failings, but his heart is right towards his God; he does trust in the Lord, and he does give himself up as a man consecrated to his Lord’s service, and, therefore, he is saved.’ I look upon Samson’s case as a great wonder, put in Scripture for the encouragement of great sinners.” (Spurgeon)

## **Micah and the Levite**

**Jdg 17:1** There was once a man named Micah, who lived in the hill country of Ephraim.

Jdg 17:2 He told his mother, "When someone stole those eleven hundred pieces of silver from you, you put a curse on the robber. I heard you do it. Look, I have the money. I am the one who took it." His mother said, "May the LORD bless you, my son!"

Jdg 17:3 He gave the money back to his mother, and she said, "To keep the curse from falling on my son, I myself am

solemnly dedicating the silver to the LORD. It will be used to make a wooden idol covered with silver. So now I will give the pieces of silver back to you."

Jdg 17:4 Then he gave them back to his mother. She took two hundred of the pieces of silver and gave them to a metalworker, who made an idol, carving it from wood and covering it with the silver. It was placed in Micah's house.

Jdg 17:5 This man Micah had his own place of worship. He made some idols and an ephod, and appointed one of his sons as his priest.

Jdg 17:6 There was no king in Israel at that time; everyone did whatever they wanted.

Jdg 17:7 At that same time there was a young Levite who had been living in the town of Bethlehem in Judah.

Jdg 17:8 He left Bethlehem to find another place to live. While he was traveling, he came to Micah's house in the hill country of Ephraim.

Jdg 17:9 Micah asked him, "Where do you come from?" He answered, "I am a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah. I am looking for a place to live."

Jdg 17:10 Micah said, "Stay with me. Be my adviser and priest, and I will give you ten pieces of silver a year, some clothes, and your food."

Jdg 17:11 The young Levite agreed to stay with Micah and became like a son to him.

Jdg 17:12 Micah appointed him as his priest, and he lived in Micah's home.

Jdg 17:13 Micah said, "Now that I have a Levite as my priest, I know that the LORD will make things go well for me."

## **Judges 17:1-13**

### **Judges 17 - Micah's Idolatry**

G. Campbell Morgan on Judges 17-21 : *"The events here recorded must have taken place closely following the death of Joshua. They give us a picture of the internal condition of the people, and it is probable that they were added with that intention by the historian."*

### **A. Micah makes a shrine for idols.**

1. (1-2) *He returns a large amount of stolen silver to his mother.*

**Now there was a man from the mountains of Ephraim, whose name was Micah. And he said to his mother, "The eleven hundred *shekels* of silver that were taken from you, and on which you put a curse, even saying it in my ears; here *is* the silver with me; I took it." And his mother said, "May you be blessed by the LORD, my son!"**

a. **Now there was a man:** Judges 17, 18 present a detailed example of the spiritual confusion and sin in Israel during the days of the Judges. These two chapters show us just how bad things were.

b. **Whose name was Micah:** Micah, from the tribe of Ephraim, stole 1,100 shekels of silver from his mother and then returned them. His mother **blessed** her son for returning the money, even though he had originally taken it.

i. This account reveals a lot about the character of Micah, his mother, and the general spiritual state of Israel during this period.

ii. Jdg 17:10 indicates that ten shekels a year was an adequate wage. Therefore, 1,100 shekels was a great fortune.

2. (3-4) *Micah's mother directs that some of the money be used to make an image to be used in worship.*

**So when he had returned the eleven hundred *shekels* of silver to his mother, his mother said, “I had wholly dedicated the silver from my hand to the LORD for my son, to make a carved image and a molded image; now therefore, I will return it to you.” Thus he returned the silver to his mother. Then his mother took two hundred *shekels* of silver and gave them to the silversmith, and he made it into a carved image and a molded image; and they were in the house of Micah.**

**a. To make a carved image and a molded image:**

Some believe this was an image of a false god (such as Baal or Ashtoreth). Others believe that it was an image representing Yahweh. Either way, God strictly forbade such an image, whether it was meant to represent the true God or not.

i. The gold calf that Aaron made was actually meant to represent Yahweh (Exo 32:4-5). But this violated the second commandment: *You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God* (Exo 20:4-5).

**b. He made it into a carved image and a molded image:** By his fallen nature, man wants to make God into *his* image. Many religious people carve their own concept of God and assume that this is the God of the Bible. It takes effort to understand and accept the God of the Bible.

i. The sense of this passage is that Micah did all this *easily*. It wasn't hard to have an idol made in Israel at that time. This shows how Israel's society was bent towards idolatry.

3. (5) *Micah establishes an elaborate worship.*

**The man Micah had a shrine, and made an ephod and household idols; and he consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest.**

a. **Micah had a shrine:** Micah first sets up a **shrine** - sort of a small temple, a place where others came to worship these idols.

b. **And made an ephod:** Micah imitated the worship at the true tabernacle of God by making an **ephod**. This was a specific garment worn by priests of Israel.

c. **And household idols:** In addition to this first idol, Micah also made **household idols** - literally, *terephim* - gods that were worshipped in hopes of gaining prosperity and guidance.

d. **He consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest:** Finally, Micah established an order of priesthood among his sons. In each of these, Micah did everything he could to set up a rival religion in Israel.

i. All of this came from Micah and not from God. This was a completely man-originated and man-centered religion. Therefore, the purpose of the shrine, the beautiful ephod, the attractive idols, and the established priesthood was to serve and please man, not God. This pattern of man-pleasing religion continues to be common with many religions and churches today.

4. (6) *A summarization of the spiritual state of Israel during the time of the Judges.*

**In those days *there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.***

a. **There was no king in Israel:** There was, in fact, a king in Israel - Israel should have recognized the LORD

God as their King. But since Israel rejected God as King, they were without any good and effective leadership.

**b. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes:**

This refers to the radical individualism that marked the time of the Judges. People looked to *self* for their guide to morality and ethics. The people genuinely felt that they **did what was right**, but they measured it only by their **own eyes**.

i. This is very much like the modern, “follow-your-heart” or “let-your-heart-be-your-guide” thinking. Modern culture regards this as the ideal state of society. Yet the Bible and common sense tell us that this kind of moral, spiritual, and social anarchy brings nothing but destruction.

- It seemed **right** to the **eyes** of Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, but God said it was wrong.
- It seemed **right** to the **eyes** of the sons of Jacob to sell Joseph into slavery, but God said it was wrong.
- It seemed **right** to the **eyes** of Nadab and Abihu to offer strange fire before the Lord, but God said it was wrong.
- It seemed **right** to the **eyes** of King David to commit adultery with Bathsheba and cover it with murder, but God said it was wrong.
- It seemed **right** to the **eyes** of Judas to betray Jesus, but God said it was wrong.

ii. *There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death (Pro 14:12).* When man follows his own instincts – apart from the redeemed nature of the converted person – it leads to ruin. We need to follow God’s way, not our own.

**B. Micah hires an unscrupulous Levite.**

*1. (7-8) An opportunistic Levite looking for employment.*

**Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah; he was a Levite, and was staying there. The man departed from the city of Bethlehem in Judah to stay wherever he could find a place. Then he came to the mountains of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, as he journeyed.**

a. **There was a young man from Bethlehem:** This man, as a **Levite**, had cities to live in and a place established by God for him to minister. Instead, he wanted to do what was right in his own eyes and went about offering himself as a priest for hire, **wherever he could find a place.**

b. **Then he came to Ephraim, to the house of Micah:** This explains how this particular Levite and the previously-mentioned Micah crossed paths.

*2. (9-11) Micah hires the Levite.*

**And Micah said to him, "Where do you come from?" So he said to him, "I *am* a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, and I am on my way to find a place to stay." Micah said to him, "Dwell with me, and be a father and a priest to me, and I will give you ten *shekels* of silver per year, a suit of clothes, and your sustenance." So the Levite went in. Then the Levite was content to dwell with the man; and the young man became like one of his sons to him.**

a. **Dwell with me, and be a father and a priest to me:** Micah wanted this Levite to stay with him and work as a **priest** for him. He did this because he wanted to legitimize his personal shrine by having an officially recognized priest serving there. Deep down he knew that his idolatry was false and meaningless, and he hoped that *this* would make it legitimate.

i. "Men crave for a priest.... Be my priest; say for me to God what I cannot say. The sacrifices offered by thy hands are more likely to avail with Him than those rendered by mine." (Meyer)

b. **I will give you ten shekels of silver per year, a suit of clothes, and your sustenance:** So, for **ten shekels** and a **suit of clothes**, the Levite hired himself out to the idolatry of Micah. The Levite was a perfect example of a hireling, someone who served God (or an idol) for what it could give him, instead of serving to glorify the LORD.

i. There are many different ways that hirelings get what they want. The monetary hireling is obvious, but there are also emotional hirelings who get into the ministry because of their insecurities and their need for approval.

c. **Then the Levite was content to dwell with Micah:** The arrangements seemed perfect to everyone and Micah felt he had gained a son.

i. "Micah was attempting to maintain his relationship with God by violating the commands of God. The Levite degenerated into an attempt to secure his own material comfort by compromise." (Morgan)

3. (12-13) *A false consecration and a false confidence.*

**So Micah consecrated the Levite, and the young man became his priest, and lived in the house of Micah. Then Micah said, "Now I know that the LORD will be good to me, since I have a Levite as priest!"**

a. **So Micah consecrated the Levite:** Micah's consecration meant nothing at all. He had no authority from God to declare a renegade Levite as set apart (**consecrated**) by God to the service of this idolatrous shrine.



i. In this tragic account, each person is guilty of terrible sin. Yet we could say that the Levite was guiltier than Micah was. We can say this because the Levite was at least *supposed* to know the Word of God.

b. **Now I know that the LORD will be good to me, since I have a Levite as priest:** Micah's confidence was just as false as his consecration was. They were both based on superstition, not on God's Word.

i. We can say Micah was utterly sincere - but totally wrong. Sincerity is nice but gets you nowhere if it is not coupled with truth. A person who sincerely thinks they can swim across the Pacific Ocean will drown just as surely as the person who isn't as sincere.

### **Danites Take the Levite and the Idol**

**Jdg 18:1** There was no king in Israel at that time. In those days the tribe of Dan was looking for territory to claim and settle in because they had not yet received any land of their own among the tribes of Israel.

Jdg 18:2 So the people of Dan chose five qualified men out of all the families in the tribe and sent them from the towns of Zorah and Eshtaol with instructions to explore the land and spy on it. When they arrived in the hill country of Ephraim, they stayed at Micah's house.

Jdg 18:3 While they were there, they recognized the accent of the young Levite, so they went up to him and asked, "What are you doing here? Who brought you here?"

Jdg 18:4 He answered, "I have an arrangement with Micah, who pays me to serve as his priest."

Jdg 18:5 They said to him, "Please ask God if we are going to be successful on our trip."

Jdg 18:6 The priest answered, "You have nothing to worry about. The LORD is taking care of you on this trip."

Jdg 18:7 So the five men left and went to the town of Laish. They saw how the people there lived in security like the Sidonians. They were a peaceful, quiet people, with no argument with anyone; they had all they needed. They lived far away from the Sidonians and had no dealings with any other people.

Jdg 18:8 When the five men returned to Zorah and Eshtaol, the people asked them what they had found out.

Jdg 18:9 "Come on," they replied. "Let's attack Laish. We saw the land, and it's very good. Don't stay here doing nothing; hurry! Go on in and take it over!"

Jdg 18:10 When you get there, you will find that the people don't suspect a thing. It is a big country; it has everything a person could want, and God has given it to you."

Jdg 18:11 So six hundred men from the tribe of Dan left Zorah and Eshtaol, ready for battle.

Jdg 18:12 They went up and camped west of Kiriath Jearim in Judah. That is why the place is still called Camp of Dan.

Jdg 18:13 They went on from there and came to Micah's house in the hill country of Ephraim.

Jdg 18:14 Then the five men who had gone to spy on the country around Laish said to their companions, "Did you know that here in one of these houses there is a wooden idol covered with silver? There are also other idols and an ephod. What do you think we should do?"

Jdg 18:15 So they went into Micah's house, where the young Levite lived, and asked the Levite how he was getting along.

Jdg 18:16 Meanwhile the six hundred Danite soldiers, ready for battle, were standing at the gate.

Jdg 18:17 The five spies went straight on into the house and took the wooden idol covered with silver, the other idols, and the ephod, while the priest stayed at the gate with the six hundred armed men.

Jdg 18:18 When the men went into Micah's house and took the sacred objects, the priest asked them, "What are you doing?"

Jdg 18:19 They told him, "Keep quiet. Don't say a word. Come with us and be our priest and adviser. Wouldn't you rather be a priest for a whole Israelite tribe than for the family of one man?"

Jdg 18:20 This made the priest very happy, so he took the sacred objects and went along with them.

Jdg 18:21 They turned around and started off, with their children, their livestock, and their belongings going ahead.

Jdg 18:22 They had traveled a good distance from the house when Micah called his neighbors out for battle. They caught up with the Danites

Jdg 18:23 and shouted at them. The Danites turned around and asked Micah, "What's the matter? Why all this mob?"

Jdg 18:24 Micah answered, "What do you mean, 'What's the matter?' You take my priest and the gods that I made, and walk off ! What have I got left?"

Jdg 18:25 The Danites told him, "You had better not say anything else unless you want these men to get angry and attack you. You and your whole family would die."

Jdg 18:26 Then the Danites went on. Micah saw that they were too strong for him, so he turned and went back home.

Jdg 18:27 (27-28) After the Danites had taken the priest and the things that Micah had made, they went and attacked Laish, that town of peaceful, quiet people which was in the same valley as Bethrehab. They killed the inhabitants and burned the town. There was no one to save them, because Laish was a long way from Sidon, and they had no dealings with any other people. The Danites rebuilt the town and settled down there.

Jdg 18:29 They changed its name from Laish to Dan, after their ancestor Dan, the son of Jacob.

Jdg 18:30 The Danites set up the idol to be worshiped, and Jonathan, the son of Gershom and grandson of Moses, served as a priest for the Danites, and his descendants served as their priests until the people were taken away into exile.

Jdg 18:31 Micah's idol remained there as long as the Tent where God was worshiped remained at Shiloh.

## **Judges 18:1-31**

### **Judges 18 - Micah's Idolatry and the Migration of the Tribe of Dan**

#### **A. Dan spies out Laish.**

*1. (1-2) The tribe of Dan sends spies to look for land to take among the people of Israel.*

**In those days *there was* no king in Israel. And in those days the tribe of the Danites was seeking an inheritance for itself to dwell in; for until that day *their* inheritance among the tribes of Israel had not fallen to them. So the children of Dan sent five men of their family from their territory, men of valor from Zorah and Eshtaol, to spy out the land and search it. They said to them, "Go, search the land." So they went to the mountains of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, and lodged there.**

**a. For until that day their inheritance among the tribes of Israel had not fallen to them:** The tribe of Dan had land apportioned to them, but they found their own land too hard to conquer.

i. Judges 17 was the story of compromise and self-willed carnality in the lives of a few individuals. Judges 18 shows how these individual sins made entire tribes wicked and rebellious against God.

- b. **So they went to the mountains of Ephraim:** Looking for easier land to conquer and make their own, the Danites came to the land of the tribe of Ephraim and the house of Micah.

2. (3-6) *The Danites meet with Micah's Levite.*

**While they were at the house of Micah, they recognized the voice of the young Levite. They turned aside and said to him, "Who brought you here? What are you doing in this *place*? What do you have here?" He said to them, "Thus and so Micah did for me. He has hired me, and I have become his priest." So they said to him, "Please inquire of God, that we may know whether the journey on which we go will be prosperous." And the priest said to them, "Go in peace. The presence of the LORD *be* with you on your way."**

- a. **They recognized the voice of the young Levite:** It may be that the spies from the tribe of Dan knew the renegade Levite personally. It is also possible that they simply recognized his accent as being from the southern part of Judea.

- b. **Please inquire of God, that we may know whether the journey on which we go will be prosperous:** This shows what a spiritually confused time this was in Israel. These Danites on a sinful mission met with a *sinful* Levite and wanted to know from a *righteous* God if their mission would be successful. Then the sinful Levite sent the sinning men on their way with God's blessing.

3. (7-10) *The Danites choose a city for expansion: Laish.*

**So the five men departed and went to Laish. They saw the people who *were* there, how they dwelt safely, in the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and secure. *There***

**were** no rulers in the land who might put *them* to shame for anything. They *were* far from the Sidonians, and they had no ties with anyone. Then *the spies* came back to their brethren at Zorah and Eshtaol, and their brethren said to them, “What *is* your *report* ?” So they said, “Arise, let us go up against them. For we have seen the land, and indeed it *is* very good. *Would* you *do* nothing? Do not hesitate to go, *and* enter to possess the land. When you go, you will come to a secure people and a large land. For God has given it into your hands, a place where *there is* no lack of anything that *is* on the earth.”

a. **They dwelt safely, in the manner of the Sidonians:** The Danites found a city nearby that was not occupied by Israelites, but by a colony of the **Sidonians**. This was a group that God told Israel to drive out of the land of Canaan (Jos 13:4).

i. In his sermon titled *The Danger of Carnal Security*, Charles Spurgeon used the description of the Sidonians in Jdg 18:7; Jdg 18:27-28 as a description of the false security of the carnal believer. They are, like the Sidonians:

- Free from all internal struggles or conflicts.
- Free from rulers such as the governor of conscience.
- Free from ties and concerns to other people.
- Free from the fear of invasion.

b. **For we have seen the land, and indeed it is very good:** Seeing that the land was good, and the city was not heavily defended, the Danites believed this would be a good city to conquer and take as their own territory.

4. (11-13) *They assemble an army of 600 to take possession of Laish.*

**And six hundred men of the family of the Danites went from there, from Zorah and Eshtaol, armed with weapons of war. Then they went up and encamped in Kirjath Jearim in Judah. (Therefore they call that place Mahaneh Dan to this day. There *it is*, west of Kirjath Jearim.) And they passed from there to the mountains of Ephraim, and came to the house of Micah.**

a. **Six hundred men... armed with weapons of war:**  
Curiously, they assembled an army of 600 men to fight for the city of Laish in the land of the tribe of Ephraim; yet they could not fight for the land of their own tribal allotment. For some reason (to them and often to us) a distant battle seemed easier than a close battle.

#### **B. The tribe of Dan adopts Micah's idolatry.**

1. (14-18a) *On their way to Laish, the army of 600 men take Micah's shrine for themselves.*

**Then the five men who had gone to spy out the country of Laish answered and said to their brethren, "Do you know that there are in these houses an ephod, household idols, a carved image, and a molded image? Now therefore, consider what you should do." So they turned aside there, and came to the house of the young Levite man; to the house of Micah; and greeted him. The six hundred men armed with their weapons of war, who were of the children of Dan, stood by the entrance of the gate. Then the five men who had gone to spy out the land went up. Entering there, they took the carved image, the ephod, the household idols, and the molded image. The priest stood at the entrance of the gate with the six hundred men *who were* armed with weapons of war. When**

**these went into Micah's house and took the carved image, the ephod, the household idols, and the molded image,**

**a. Entering there, they took the carved image, the ephod, the household idols, and the molded image:**

This was a strange combination of low morality and strong religious feeling. It was as if someone really wanted to study the Bible - therefore they stole several Bibles.

i. There are many examples in history of people satisfying a religious impulse in a completely immoral way. In Europe in the 14<sup>th</sup> century unemployed soldiers often became small armies of bandits and robbed and burned and killed and raped towns and villages all over Europe. These brutal criminals often negotiated with a town before attacking it. If the town agreed to give the brutes a large amount of money, the army left the city alone. If the town refused to give the money or could not give the money, they attacked. These were done with formal negotiations and contracts. They have discovered that when these horrible men came to a monastery, they insisted on money as well - but they also demanded that the priests of the monastery give them a written document saying that all their sins were forgiven.

**b. Took the carved image, the ephod, the household idols, and the molded image:** They used violence and theft to supposedly advance a religious cause, and **the priest** allowed them by standing aside as they did so.

i. During the Los Angeles riots in the 1990's, a reporter came across three looters leaving a store. He asked them what they took, and the first two told him



off with profanity. But the third man said, "I got some gospel music. I love Jesus!"

2. (18b-21) *The Levite goes with the army from the tribe of Dan.*

**The priest said to them, "What are you doing?" And they said to him, "Be quiet, put your hand over your mouth, and come with us; be a father and a priest to us. *Is it* better for you to be a priest to the household of one man, or that you be a priest to a tribe and a family in Israel?" So the priest's heart was glad; and he took the ephod, the household idols, and the carved image, and took his place among the people. Then they turned and departed, and put the little ones, the livestock, and the goods in front of them.**

a. **Put your hand over your mouth:** This was a threat. They commanded the Levite to stop objecting or be attacked.

b. **So the priest's heart was glad:** His heart was glad because he was filled with mercenary ambition. The Levite did not care about Micah, only for the pay and status that he might get by being the priest for a whole tribe instead of a mere family.

3. (22-24) *Micah's foolish idolatry comes to nothing.*

**When they were a good way from the house of Micah, the men who *were* in the houses near Micah's house gathered together and overtook the children of Dan. And they called out to the children of Dan. So they turned around and said to Micah, "What ails you, that you have gathered such a company?" So he said, "You have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and you have gone away. Now what more do I have? How can you say to me, 'What ails you?'"**

**a. You have taken away my gods which I made:**

This is powerful irony. Micah had to rescue his own gods. Obviously, his gods should be able to care for themselves. We wonder if Micah saw the foolishness of this.

i. We each either worship a god of our own making or we worship the true God who made us. But the gods we make are always less than we are. Idol worship is just another way of worshipping self.

ii. **And the priest:** Micah was foolish enough to have a priest who could be taken away, and it reminds us of how wonderful it is to have a High Priest who cannot change, and who can never be taken away from us. As F.B. Meyer wrote, "Whatever can be taken from us has the mark and signature of man upon it." Yet Jesus Christ, our High Priest, can never change; will never leave us out of a concern for someone else; and our sins and failures cannot rob us of Him.

**b. Now what more do I have:** This shows how empty Micah's idolatry was. His false gods didn't bring him any lasting good.

*4. (25-26) The army of the tribe of Dan refuses to give Micah his god back, so Micah goes home empty handed.*

**And the children of Dan said to him, "Do not let your voice be heard among us, lest angry men fall upon you, and you lose your life, with the lives of your household!" Then the children of Dan went their way. And when Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back to his house.**

**a. Lest angry men fall upon you, and you lose your life:** This event and these words illustrate the general lawlessness in Israel during this long period of the

Judges. The children of Dan stole Micah's idol simply under the principle of "might makes right."

b. **When Micah saw that they were too strong for him:** They were too strong for *both* Micah and his gods. One should never have a god that needs protection.

5. (27-29) *The army from the tribe of Dan conquers the city of Laish and rename it Dan.*

**So they took *the things* Micah had made, and the priest who had belonged to him, and went to Laish, to a people quiet and secure; and they struck them with the edge of the sword and burned the city with fire. *There was no deliverer, because it was far from Sidon, and they had no ties with anyone. It was in the valley that belongs to Beth Rehob. So they rebuilt the city and dwelt there. And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father, who was born to Israel. However, the name of the city formerly was Laish.***

a. **To Laish, to a people quiet and secure... There was no deliverer:** This is written in a way meant to make us at least a little sympathetic for the people of Laish. The people of Israel were instructed to take the land from the Canaanites, but this seemed like an unprincipled attack from wicked men of the tribe of Dan.

b. **And they called the name of the city Dan:** The city of **Dan** will become the most prominent northern city in Israel. The phrase "from Dan to Beersheba" (Jdg 20:1, 1Sa 3:20) will become an expression meaning, "from the north to the south of Israel" indicating all of Israel.

6. (30-31) *The tribe of Dan officially adopts the idolatry that began with Micah.*

**Then the children of Dan set up for themselves the carved image; and Jonathan the son of Gershom, the**

**son of Manasseh, and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land. So they set up for themselves Micah's carved image which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh.**

**a. The children of Dan set up for themselves the carved image:** This was the beginning of *established* idolatry in Israel in the Promised Land. There was *individual* idolatry in Israel long before this, but this is *official* idolatry.

i. Through a strange chain of events, this began with a son stealing 1,100 shekels from his mother (Jdg 17:1-2). It ended with an entire tribe of Israel led into established idolatry.

**b. So they set up for themselves Micah's carved image:** We can suppose that Micah had no idea how far-reaching the effects of his sin would become. His personal idolatry became the idolatry of an entire tribe, setting up a rival center of worship to **the house of God... in Shiloh.**

i. "Whether intentionally on the part of the writer or no, there is a touch of satire in this declaration. There, at Shiloh, was the true centre of the national life, the house of God... Nevertheless, at Dan they gathered about the false, and rendered a worship which was destructive." (Morgan)

### **A Levite and His Concubine**

**Jdg 19:1** In those days before Israel had a king, there was a Levite living far back in the hill country of Ephraim. He took a young woman from Bethlehem in Judah to be his concubine.

Jdg 19:2 But she became angry with him, went back to her father's house in Bethlehem, and stayed there four

months.

Jdg 19:3 Then the man decided to go after her and try to persuade her to return to him. He took his servant and two donkeys with him. The woman showed the Levite into the house, and when her father saw him, he gave him a hearty greeting.

Jdg 19:4 The father insisted that he stay, and so he stayed for three days. The couple had their meals and spent the nights there.

Jdg 19:5 On the morning of the fourth day they woke up early and got ready to go. But the woman's father said to the Levite, "Have something to eat first. You'll feel better. You can go later."

Jdg 19:6 So the two men sat down and ate and drank together. Then the woman's father told him, "Please spend the night and enjoy yourself."

Jdg 19:7 The Levite got up to go, but the father urged him to stay, so he spent another night there.

Jdg 19:8 Early in the morning of the fifth day he started to leave, but the woman's father said, "Eat something, please. Wait until later in the day." So the two men ate together.

Jdg 19:9 When the man, his concubine, and the servant once more started to leave, the father said, "Look, it's almost evening now; you might as well stay all night. It will be dark soon; stay here and have a good time. Tomorrow you can get up early for the trip and go home."

Jdg 19:10 (10-11) But the man did not want to spend another night there, so he and his concubine started on their way, with their servant and two donkeys with pack saddles. It was late in the day when they came near Jebus (that is, Jerusalem), so the servant said to his master, "Why don't we stop and spend the night here in this Jebusite city?"

Jdg 19:12 (12-13) But his master said, "We're not going to stop in a city where the people are not Israelites. We'll pass on by and go a little farther and spend the night at Gibeah or Ramah."

Jdg 19:14 So they passed by Jebus and continued on their way. It was sunset when they came to Gibeah in the territory of the tribe of Benjamin.

Jdg 19:15 They turned off the road to go and spend the night there. They went into town and sat down in the city square, but no one offered to take them home for the night.

Jdg 19:16 While they were there, an old man came by at the end of a day's work on the farm. He was originally from the hill country of Ephraim, but he was now living in Gibeah. (The other people there were from the tribe of Benjamin.)

Jdg 19:17 The old man noticed the traveler in the city square and asked him, "Where do you come from? Where are you going?"

Jdg 19:18 The Levite answered, "We have been in Bethlehem in Judah, and now we are on our way home deep in the hill country of Ephraim. No one will put us up for the night,

Jdg 19:19 even though we have fodder and straw for our donkeys, as well as bread and wine for my concubine and me and for my servant. We have everything we need."

Jdg 19:20 The old man said, "You are welcome in my home! I'll take care of you; you don't have to spend the night in the square."

Jdg 19:21 So he took them home with him and fed their donkeys. His guests washed their feet and had a meal.

### **Gibeah's Crime**

Jdg 19:22 They were enjoying themselves when all of a sudden some sexual perverts from the town surrounded the

house and started beating on the door. They said to the old man, "Bring out that man that came home with you! We want to have sex with him!"

Jdg 19:23 But the old man went outside and said to them, "No, my friends! Please! Don't do such an evil, immoral thing! This man is my guest.

Jdg 19:24 Look! Here is his concubine and my own virgin daughter. I'll bring them out now, and you can have them. Do whatever you want to with them. But don't do such an awful thing to this man!"

Jdg 19:25 But the men would not listen to him. So the Levite took his concubine and put her outside with them. They raped her and abused her all night long and didn't stop until morning.

Jdg 19:26 At dawn the woman came and fell down at the door of the old man's house, where her husband was. She was still there when daylight came.

Jdg 19:27 Her husband got up that morning, and when he opened the door to go on his way, he found his concubine lying in front of the house with her hands reaching for the door.

Jdg 19:28 He said, "Get up. Let's go." But there was no answer. So he put her body across the donkey and started on his way home.

Jdg 19:29 When he arrived, he went in the house and got a knife. He took his concubine's body, cut it into twelve pieces, and sent one piece to each of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Jdg 19:30 Everyone who saw it said, "We have never heard of such a thing! Nothing like this has ever happened since the Israelites left Egypt! We have to do something about this! What will it be?"

## **Judges 19:1-30**

## Judges 19 - Gibeah's Crime

### A. The Levite and his concubine.

1. (1) *A Levite takes a concubine.*

**And it came to pass in those days, when *there was no king in Israel*, that there was a certain Levite staying in the remote mountains of Ephraim. He took for himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah.**

a. **There was no king in Israel:** This set the stage for the terrible story in the following chapters. **No king in Israel** meant more than the absence of a political monarch; it also meant that they refused to recognize *God's leadership* over them.

i. What unfolds in the rest of this chapter is so distasteful that the commentator F.B. Meyer recommended *not* reading it. Commenting on this first verse, he wrote: "It will be sufficient to ponder these words, which occur four times in the book, without reading further in this terrible chapter, which shows the depths of the depravity to which may sink apart from the grace of God."

b. **He took for himself a concubine:** The Levite's **concubine** was recognized as his legal partner, but she did not have the same status in the home or in society as a wife.

i. In this sense a concubine was a legal mistress. Many prominent men in the Old Testament had concubines. Examples include Abraham (Gen 25:6), Jacob (Gen 35:22), Caleb (1Ch 2:46), Saul (2Sa 3:7), David (2Sa 5:13), Solomon (1Ki 11:3-43 concubines), and Rehoboam (2Ch 11:21). Significantly, we *never* see this kind of family life blessed by God.



ii. The New Testament makes it clear that from the beginning God's plan was one man and one woman to be one flesh forever (Mat 19:4-6), and each man is to be a "one-woman man" (1Ti 3:2).

2. (2-4) *The Levite reconciles with his concubine after she commits adultery.*

**But his concubine played the harlot against him, and went away from him to her father's house at Bethlehem in Judah, and was there four whole months. Then her husband arose and went after her, to speak kindly to her *and* bring her back, having his servant and a couple of donkeys with him. So she brought him into her father's house; and when the father of the young woman saw him, he was glad to meet him. Now his father-in-law, the young woman's father, detained him; and he stayed with him three days. So they ate and drank and lodged there.**

a. **Went after her, to speak kindly to her and bring her back:** Here the Levite was an example of how an offended spouse should act when there is adultery. Though she broke the bond between them, he worked hard to bring the relationship back together and succeeded.

i. Jesus told us that divorce is never *commanded* when there is adultery (Mat 19:8). If a partner in marriage is sinned against by adultery, they should still work to make the marriage survive and succeed, up to the best of their ability.

b. **When the father of the young woman saw him, he was glad to meet him:** Perhaps the father was glad to see the Levite and his daughter back together or perhaps the father was simply glad to have his daughter out of his house again.

3. (5-10) *The father of the concubine extends the visit with a traditionally generous show of hospitality.*

**Then it came to pass on the fourth day that they arose early in the morning, and he stood to depart; but the young woman's father said to his son-in-law, "Refresh your heart with a morsel of bread, and afterward go your way." So they sat down, and the two of them ate and drank together. Then the young woman's father said to the man, "Please be content to stay all night, and let your heart be merry." And when the man stood to depart, his father-in-law urged him; so he lodged there again. Then he arose early in the morning on the fifth day to depart, but the young woman's father said, "Please refresh your heart." So they delayed until afternoon; and both of them ate. And when the man stood to depart; he and his concubine and his servant; his father-in-law, the young woman's father, said to him, "Look, the day is now drawing toward evening; please spend the night. See, the day is coming to an end; lodge here, that your heart may be merry. Tomorrow go your way early, so that you may get home." However, the man was not willing to spend that night; so he rose and departed, and came to opposite Jebus (that is, Jerusalem). With him were the two saddled donkeys; his concubine was also with him.**

a. **It came to pass on the fourth day:** This portion explains why the Levite and his concubine were delayed in Bethlehem at the home of the concubine's father. He intended to leave on **the fourth day** but was persuaded to stay one more night.

b. **So they delayed until afternoon:** This explains why they left late in the day instead of early in the morning,

which would normally be a more sensible time to depart for a long journey.

4. (11-15) *Returning home, the Levite and the concubine decide to spend the night in Gibeah.*

**They were near Jebus, and the day was far spent; and the servant said to his master, "Come, please, and let us turn aside into this city of the Jebusites and lodge in it." But his master said to him, "We will not turn aside here into a city of foreigners, who *are* not of the children of Israel; we will go on to Gibeah." So he said to his servant, "Come, let us draw near to one of these places, and spend the night in Gibeah or in Ramah." And they passed by and went their way; and the sun went down on them near Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin. They turned aside there to go in to lodge in Gibeah. And when he went in, he sat down in the open square of the city, for no one would take them into *his* house to spend the night.**

a. **We will not turn aside here into a city of foreigners:** The Levite and his concubine considered a pagan town too dangerous. They therefore went on to **Gibeah**, a city of Israel, because they thought they would be safer there.

b. **No one would take them into his house to spend the night:** The Levite and his concubine found no hospitality in Gibeah. This reflects poorly on the people of Gibeah because God commanded such hospitality among the people of God (Lev 19:33-34, Lev 25:35, Mat 25:35, Heb 13:2). There is something wrong when there is no such hospitality among God's people.

5. (16-21) *Finally, a fellow Ephraimite finds them and extends hospitality.*

Just then an old man came in from his work in the field at evening, who also *was* from the mountains of Ephraim; he was staying in Gibeah, whereas the men of the place *were* Benjamites. And when he raised his eyes, he saw the traveler in the open square of the city; and the old man said, "Where are you going, and where do you come from?" So he said to him, "*We are* passing from Bethlehem in Judah toward the remote mountains of Ephraim; I *am* from there. I went to Bethlehem in Judah; *now* I am going to the house of the LORD. But there *is* no one who will take me into his house, although we have both straw and fodder for our donkeys, and bread and wine for myself, for your female servant, and for the young man *who is* with your servant; *there is* no lack of anything." And the old man said, "Peace *be* with you! However, *let* all your needs *be* my responsibility; only do not spend the night in the open square." So he brought him into his house, and gave fodder to the donkeys. And they washed their feet, and ate and drank.

a. **Who also was from the mountains of Ephraim:**

The only person to extend hospitality to the Levite and his concubine was a man from their own region. None of the native people of Gibeah cared for the strangers in their midst.

b. **Now I am going to the house of the LORD:** We remember that the **house of the LORD** was not at Jerusalem, but at Shiloh (Jdg 18:31).

**B. The crime of Gibeah.**

1. (22) *Their perverted demand.*

**As they were enjoying themselves, suddenly certain men of the city, perverted men, surrounded the house *and* beat on the door. They spoke to the master of the house, the old man, saying, "Bring out the man who**

**came to your house, that we may know him *carnally* !”**

a. **Surrounded the house and beat on the door:** The verb form of the term **beat on the door** indicates that there was an increasingly loud pounding on the door. This was in no way a polite or casual request.

b. **Bring out the man who came to your house, that we may know him *carnally*:** Their request was the same made by the homosexuals who surrounded the house of Lot in Sodom (Gen 19:5). The picture is clear: During the time of the Judges, Israel was as bad as Sodom and Gomorrah.

*2. (23-26) The wickedness and perversion of the men of Gibeah.*

**But the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, “No, my brethren! I beg you, do not act so wickedly! Seeing this man has come into my house, do not commit this outrage. Look, *here is* my virgin daughter and *the man’s* concubine; let me bring them out now. Humble them, and do with them as you please; but to this man do not do such a vile thing!” But the men would not heed him. So the man took his concubine and brought *her* out to them. And they knew her and abused her all night until morning; and when the day began to break, they let her go. Then the woman came as the day was dawning, and fell down at the door of the man’s house where her master *was*, till it was light.**

a. **The man took his concubine and brought her out to them:** Though the perverted men of Gibeah were clearly guilty, so were the Levite and the host of the home. They clearly should have been willing to sacrifice themselves before their daughters and companions.

i. Each person in this sordid drama was guilty, except of course for the concubine herself.

- The wicked men of Gibeah who were more like men of Sodom and Gomorrah than men of Israel.
- The master of the house who was willing to sacrifice his own daughter.
- The Levite who cared nothing for his concubine.

b. **And they knew her and abused her:** When describing the full meaning of the original Hebrew, Adam Clarke, due to modesty, did not translate the meaning into English. He left it in Latin so only the learned could understand the full implications of the wickedness and perversion of the men of Gibeah.

i. "One can easily see why the concubine had left her husband in the first place. She was virtually sacrificed to save his skin as the men sexually abused her all night." (Wolf)

ii. Clarke on Gibeah's sinful men: "Rascals and miscreants of the deepest dye; worse than brutes, being a compound of beast and devil inseparably blended."

iii. Centuries later, Israel still remembered this crime at Gibeah, and used it as an example of wickedness. *They are deeply corrupted, as in the days of Gibeah (Hos 9:9); O Israel, you have sinned from the days of Gibeah (Hos 10:9).*

3. (27-30) *The Levite discovers his dead concubine and issues a call for national judgment.*

**When her master arose in the morning, and opened the doors of the house and went out to go his way, there was his concubine, fallen *at* the door of the house with her hands on the threshold. And he said to**

her, "Get up and let us be going." But there was no answer. So the man lifted her onto the donkey; and the man got up and went to his place. When he entered his house he took a knife, laid hold of his concubine, and divided her into twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel. And so it was that all who saw it said, "No such deed has been done or seen from the day that the children of Israel came up from the land of Egypt until this day. Consider it, confer, and speak up!"

a. **Get up and let us be going:** This is a painfully clear demonstration of the heartlessness of the Levite towards his concubine.

b. **Divided her into twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel:** This was an obviously grotesque way to deliver a message, but the method worked. It was tragic that the Levite did not show this kind of concern for righteousness earlier.

### **Israel's War with the Tribe of Benjamin**

**Jdg 20:1** All the people of Israel from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south, as well as from the land of Gilead in the east, answered the call. They gathered in one body in the LORD's presence at Mizpah.

Jdg 20:2 The leaders of all the tribes of Israel were present at this gathering of God's people, and there were 400,000 foot soldiers.

Jdg 20:3 Meanwhile the people of Benjamin heard that all the other Israelites had gathered at Mizpah. The Israelites asked, "Tell us, how was this crime committed?"

Jdg 20:4 The Levite whose concubine had been murdered answered, "My concubine and I went to Gibeah in the territory of Benjamin to spend the night.

Jdg 20:5 The men of Gibeah came to get me and surrounded the house at night. They intended to kill me; instead they raped my concubine, and she died.

Jdg 20:6 I took her body, cut it in pieces, and sent one piece to each of the twelve tribes of Israel. These people have committed an evil and immoral act among us.

Jdg 20:7 All of you here are Israelites. What are we going to do about this?"

Jdg 20:8 All the people stood up together and said, "None of us, whether he lives in a tent or in a house, will go home.

Jdg 20:9 This is what we will do: we will draw lots and choose some men to attack Gibeah.

Jdg 20:10 One tenth of the men in Israel will provide food for the army, and the others will go and punish Gibeah for this immoral act that they have committed in Israel."

Jdg 20:11 So all the men in Israel assembled with one purpose—to attack the town.

Jdg 20:12 The Israelite tribes sent messengers all through the territory of the tribe of Benjamin to say, "What is this crime that you have committed?"

Jdg 20:13 Now hand over those perverts in Gibeah, so that we can kill them and remove this evil from Israel." But the people of Benjamin paid no attention to the other Israelites.

Jdg 20:14 From all the cities of Benjamin they came to Gibeah to fight the other people of Israel.

Jdg 20:15 (15-16) They called out twenty-six thousand soldiers from their cities that day. Besides these, the citizens of Gibeah gathered seven hundred specially chosen men who were left-handed. Every one of them could sling a stone at a strand of hair and never miss.

Jdg 20:17 Not counting the tribe of Benjamin, the Israelites gathered 400,000 trained soldiers.



Jdg 20:18 The Israelites went to the place of worship at Bethel, and there they asked God, "Which tribe should attack the Benjaminites first?" The LORD answered, "The tribe of Judah."

Jdg 20:19 So the Israelites started out the next morning and camped near the city of Gibeah.

Jdg 20:20 They went to attack the army of Benjamin, and placed the soldiers in position facing the city.

Jdg 20:21 The army of Benjamin came out of the city, and before the day was over they had killed twenty-two thousand Israelite soldiers.

Jdg 20:22 (22-23) Then the Israelites went to the place of worship and mourned in the presence of the LORD until evening. They asked him, "Should we go again into battle against our brothers the Benjaminites?" The LORD answered, "Yes." So the Israelite army was encouraged, and they placed their soldiers in position again, where they had been the day before.

Jdg 20:24 They marched against the army of Benjamin a second time.

Jdg 20:25 And for the second time the Benjaminites came out of Gibeah, and this time they killed eighteen thousand trained Israelite soldiers.

Jdg 20:26 Then all the people of Israel went up to Bethel and mourned. They sat there in the LORD's presence and did not eat until evening. They offered fellowship sacrifices and burned some sacrifices whole—all in the presence of the LORD.

Jdg 20:27 (27-28) God's Covenant Box was there at Bethel in those days, and Phinehas, the son of Eleazar and grandson of Aaron, was in charge of it. The people asked the LORD, "Should we go out to fight our brothers the Benjaminites again, or should we give up?" The LORD

answered, "Fight. Tomorrow I will give you victory over them."

Jdg 20:29 So the Israelites put some soldiers in hiding around Gibeah.

Jdg 20:30 Then for the third straight day they marched against the army of Benjamin and placed their soldiers in battle position facing Gibeah, as they had done before.

Jdg 20:31 The Benjaminites came out to fight and were led away from the city. As they had before, they began killing some Israelites in the open country, on the road to Bethel and on the road to Gibeah. They killed about thirty Israelites.

Jdg 20:32 The Benjaminites said, "We've beaten them just as before." But the Israelites had planned to retreat and lead them away from the city onto the roads.

Jdg 20:33 So when the main army of the Israelites pulled back and regrouped at Baaltamar, the men surrounding Gibeah suddenly rushed out of their hiding places in the rocky country around the city.

Jdg 20:34 Ten thousand men, specially chosen out of all Israel, attacked Gibeah, and the fighting was hard. The Benjaminites had not realized that they were about to be destroyed.

Jdg 20:35 The LORD gave Israel victory over the army of Benjamin. The Israelites killed 25,100 of the enemy that day,

Jdg 20:36 and the Benjaminites realized they were defeated. The main body of the Israelite army had retreated from the Benjaminites because they were relying on the men that they had put in hiding around Gibeah.

Jdg 20:37 These men ran quickly toward Gibeah; they spread out in the city and killed everyone there.

Jdg 20:38 The main Israelite army and the men in hiding had arranged a signal. When they saw a big cloud of smoke

going up from the town,

Jdg 20:39 the Israelites out on the battlefield were to turn around. By this time the Benjaminites had already killed the thirty Israelites. They told themselves, "Yes, we've beaten them just as before."

Jdg 20:40 Then the signal appeared; a cloud of smoke began to go up from the town. The Benjaminites looked behind them and were amazed to see the whole city going up in flames.

Jdg 20:41 Then the Israelites turned around, and the Benjaminites were thrown into panic because they realized that they were about to be destroyed.

Jdg 20:42 They retreated from the Israelites and ran toward the open country, but they could not escape. They were caught between the main army and the men who were now coming out of the city, and they were destroyed.

Jdg 20:43 The Israelites had the enemy trapped, and without stopping they pursued them as far as a point east of Gibeah, killing them as they went.

Jdg 20:44 Eighteen thousand of the best Benjaminite soldiers were killed.

Jdg 20:45 The others turned and ran toward the open country to Rimmon Rock. Five thousand of them were killed on the roads. The Israelites continued to pursue the rest to Gidom, killing two thousand.

Jdg 20:46 In all, twenty-five thousand Benjaminites were killed that day—all of them brave soldiers.

Jdg 20:47 But six hundred men were able to escape to the open country to Rimmon Rock, and they stayed there four months.

Jdg 20:48 The Israelites turned back against the rest of the Benjaminites and killed them all—men, women, and children, and animals as well. They burned every town in the area.

# Judges 20:1-48

## Judges 20 - Israel's War with Benjamin and Gibeah

### A. The nation gathers to judge Gibeah.

*1. (1-2) The nation gathers at the Levite's request.*

**So all the children of Israel came out, from Dan to Beersheba, as well as from the land of Gilead, and the congregation gathered together as one man before the LORD at Mizpah. And the leaders of all the people, all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, four hundred thousand foot soldiers who drew the sword.**

a. **So all the children of Israel came out:** It was a positive sign to see Israel gather for such a reason. This showed that they were willing to deal with the problem of sin in their midst.

i. "A great moral passion flamed out. Underneath all the degeneracy was a true stratum of religious conviction, which in the presence of the iniquity of the men of Gibeah sprang to life and action." (Morgan)

ii. It seems that the crime of Gibeah shocked the conscience of Israel. Today it seems that the crime at Gibeah would be material for tabloid news, cable television, daytime talk shows, and talk radio - more than a national call to righteousness and repentance.

b. **The leaders of all the people, all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves:** Deu 13:12-18 instructed Israel how to deal with such abominations among them. It said they must first test the truth of the accusations. If the charges were true, they must then utterly destroy those who committed such an abomination.

2. (3-7) *The Levite describes the abuse and murder of his concubine.*

**(Now the children of Benjamin heard that the children of Israel had gone up to Mizpah.) Then the children of Israel said, "Tell *us*, how did this wicked deed happen?" So the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered and said, "My concubine and I went into Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin, to spend the night. And the men of Gibeah rose against me, and surrounded the house at night because of me. They intended to kill me, but instead they ravished my concubine so that she died. So I took hold of my concubine, cut her in pieces, and sent her throughout all the territory of the inheritance of Israel, because they committed lewdness and outrage in Israel. Look! All of you *are* children of Israel; give your advice and counsel here and now!"**

a. **Tell us, how did this wicked deed happen:** The children of Benjamin wanted to know, so they could *do* something about this outrage.

b. **They intended to kill me, but instead ravished my concubine:** The Levite spun the story to his own advantage. What he said was true, but he *didn't* mention the cruel and callous way he abandoned his concubine to the mob.

3. (8-11) *Preparations for war made.*

**So all the people arose as one man, saying, "None of *us* will go to his tent, nor will any turn back to his house; but now this *is* the thing which we will do to Gibeah: *We will go up* against it by lot. We will take ten men out of *every* hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel, a hundred out of *every* thousand, and a thousand out of *every* ten thousand, to make provisions for the people, that when they come to**

**Gibeah in Benjamin, they may repay all the vileness that they have done in Israel.” So all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, united together as one man.**

a. **So all the people arose as one man:** This was an encouraging response in a very dark time. They came together in unity and decided to bring justice to the people of Gibeah.

b. **They may repay all the vileness that they have done in Israel:** This was extreme, but a valid and proper fulfillment of God’s command to Israel Deu 13:12-18.

4. *(12-17) Benjamin’s help sought and not given.*

**Then the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, “What *is* this wickedness that has occurred among you? Now therefore, deliver up the men, the perverted men who *are* in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and remove the evil from Israel!” But the children of Benjamin would not listen to the voice of their brethren, the children of Israel. Instead, the children of Benjamin gathered together from their cities to Gibeah, to go to battle against the children of Israel. And from their cities at that time the children of Benjamin numbered twenty-six thousand men who drew the sword, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah, who numbered seven hundred select men. Among all this people *were* seven hundred select men *who were* left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair’s *breadth* and not miss. Now besides Benjamin, the men of Israel numbered four hundred thousand men who drew the sword; all of these *were* men of war.**

a. **But the children of Benjamin would not listen to the voice of their brethren:** The other tribes of Israel

did the right thing in asking the tribe of Benjamin to **deliver up the men** who committed this crime. They sought to justly resolve the crisis without full war. But the tribe of Benjamin committed a great sin by putting loyalty to their tribe before obedience to God's Law.

i. Modern followers of God can make the same mistake today when they put the interests of their own nation before the interests of the Kingdom of God. It is important for Christians to remember that they are citizens of the Kingdom of God first (Php 3:20).

b. **Seven hundred select men who were left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair's breadth and not miss:** The tribe of Benjamin not only failed to support the just cause of the other tribes, they actively resisted the other tribes with an assembled army. The army included this division of **seven hundred select men**.

i. **And not miss:** The Hebrew word translated **miss** is literally *sin*. This illustrates the principle that the word "sin" literally means to "miss the mark" - whether you are off by an inch or a yard.

c. **Besides Benjamin, the men of Israel numbered four hundred thousand men:** The tribes of Israel prepared for a small civil war against the tribe of Benjamin. Israel was right in believing that the greatest good was not unity. Unity apart from justice and truth is unity not worth having.

## **B. The battle against Benjamin and Gibeah.**

*1. (18-21) The first day of battle - Israel is defeated before Benjamin.*

**Then the children of Israel arose and went up to the house of God to inquire of God. They said, "Which of**

**us shall go up first to battle against the children of Benjamin?" The LORD said, "Judah first!" So the children of Israel rose in the morning and encamped against Gibeah. And the men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin, and the men of Israel put themselves in battle array to fight against them at Gibeah. Then the children of Benjamin came out of Gibeah, and on that day cut down to the ground twenty-two thousand men of the Israelites.**

**a. Went up to the house of God to inquire of God:**

In the first battle, Israel sought the LORD - yet they were defeated. We can speculate that though they inquired of God, they still trusted in the might of their army and in the goodness of their cause, but not in the LORD.

**b. The children of Benjamin came out of Gibeah, and on that day cut down to the ground twenty-two thousand men of the Israelites:** This was a staggering, severe loss in the first battle of this small civil war. After this first day of battle it seemed that single tribe of Benjamin might successfully resist the other tribes of Israel.

i. Perhaps there was something wrong in the way that Israel sought the Lord before this battle; or, it is also just as likely that this was simply part of God's plan to discipline and correct His disobedient nation.

ii. The American President, Abraham Lincoln, in his second inaugural address, spoke on this very theme in relation to the American Civil War:

*Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of*



*blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether." (1865)*

iii. Perhaps, something of the same dynamic was at work with Israel at this time – God correcting a disobedient nation through the tragic loss of 22,000 soldiers of Israel.

*2. (22-23) Israel seeks God after the first defeat.*

**And the people, that is, the men of Israel, encouraged themselves and again formed the battle line at the place where they had put themselves in array on the first day. Then the children of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until evening, and asked counsel of the LORD, saying, "Shall I again draw near for battle against the children of my brother Benjamin?" And the LORD said, "Go up against him."**

a. **The men of Israel, encouraged themselves and again formed the battle line:** This was a wonderful reaction in the midst of such a dark event. These soldiers did not lose hope; like David in 1Sa 30:6, they strengthened themselves in the LORD and moved forward.

b. **Then the children of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until evening:** To their credit, the children of Israel did not stop seeking the LORD after the first disaster in battle. They properly humbled themselves before God and sought Him regarding the next battle.

*3. (24-25) On the second day of battle Israel is defeated before Benjamin again.*

**So the children of Israel approached the children of Benjamin on the second day. And Benjamin went out**

**against them from Gibeah on the second day, and cut down to the ground eighteen thousand more of the children of Israel; all these drew the sword.**

**a. So the children of Israel approached the children of Benjamin on the second day:** This would not be an easy or a quick war. After a first day of heavy losses, they **children of Israel** were willing to keep fighting.

**b. Cut down to the ground eighteen thousand more of the children of Israel:** The loss on the second day of battle was also severe. This shows that even though the tribes of Israel sought the LORD and fought in a just cause, it was still a very difficult struggle. There was a great cost for them to pay in doing what was right.

*4. (26-28) Israel repents before God after the second defeat.*

**Then all the children of Israel, that is, all the people, went up and came to the house of God and wept. They sat there before the LORD and fasted that day until evening; and they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD. So the children of Israel inquired of the LORD (the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days, and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days), saying, "Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of my brother Benjamin, or shall I cease?" And the LORD said, "Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand."**

**a. Went up and came to the house of God and wept. They sat there before the LORD and fasted that day until evening:** God allowed the two days of defeat for the purpose of bringing Israel low. They needed to be humbled, and these days of defeat compelled them to humble themselves.

i. God used this to humble the whole nation. They had to understand that the horror of the crime at Gibeah was not merely the result of the sin of one group of men, or one city, or even one tribe. The whole nation had to be humbled because they first thought that the sin problem was only in Benjamin. Israel had to see that that nation as a whole had a sin problem.

ii. After the first failure, Israel was sorry and wept. But it was only after the second failure that they put their repentance into action by fasting and made a sacrifice for sins. Sorrow and weeping are not enough if they are not matched by real repentance and taking care of the sin problem through sacrifice - the sacrifice of the cross.

iii. Part of their demonstration of humility was in *fasting*. In 1827, Adam Clarke wrote about fasting: "At present it is but little used; a strong proof that *self-denial* is wearing out of fashion." Clarke thought this was true of his day; he would probably think it all the truer of modern times.

iv. The mention of Phinehas as high priest means that this was fairly early in the days of the Judges (Num 25:7; Num 25:11).

b. **Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand:** God didn't want the two days of humbling to make Israel think that they could never win. They were encouraged to go out **tomorrow** and trust God's promise.

*5. (29-48) Third day of battle - victory for Israel over Benjamin and Gibeah.*

**Then Israel set men in ambush all around Gibeah. And the children of Israel went up against the children of Benjamin on the third day, and put themselves in**

battle array against Gibeah as at the other times. So the children of Benjamin went out against the people, *and* were drawn away from the city. They began to strike down *and* kill some of the people, as at the other times, in the highways (one of which goes up to Bethel and the other to Gibeah) and in the field, about thirty men of Israel. And the children of Benjamin said, "They *are* defeated before us, as at first." But the children of Israel said, "Let us flee and draw them away from the city to the highways." So all the men of Israel rose from their place and put themselves in battle array at Baal Tamar. Then Israel's men in ambush burst forth from their position in the plain of Geba. And ten thousand select men from all Israel came against Gibeah, and the battle was fierce. But *the Benjamites* did not know that disaster *was* upon them. The LORD defeated Benjamin before Israel. And the children of Israel destroyed that day twenty-five thousand one hundred Benjamites; all these drew the sword. So the children of Benjamin saw that they were defeated. The men of Israel had given ground to the Benjamites, because they relied on the men in ambush whom they had set against Gibeah. And the men in ambush quickly rushed upon Gibeah; the men in ambush spread out and struck the whole city with the edge of the sword. Now the appointed signal between the men of Israel and the men in ambush was that they would make a great cloud of smoke rise up from the city, whereupon the men of Israel would turn in battle. Now Benjamin had begun to strike *and* kill about thirty of the men of Israel. For they said, "Surely they are defeated before us, as *in* the first battle." But when the cloud began to rise from the city in a column of smoke, the Benjamites looked behind them, and there was the whole city going up *in smoke* to heaven. And when the men of Israel

turned back, the men of Benjamin panicked, for they saw that disaster had come upon them. Therefore they turned *their backs* before the men of Israel in the direction of the wilderness; but the battle overtook them, and whoever *came* out of the cities they destroyed in their midst. They surrounded the Benjamites, chased them, *and* easily trampled them down as far as the front of Gibeah toward the east. And eighteen thousand men of Benjamin fell; all these *were* men of valor. Then they turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon; and they cut down five thousand of them on the highways. Then they pursued them relentlessly up to Gidom, and killed two thousand of them. So all who fell of Benjamin that day were twenty-five thousand men who drew the sword; all these *were* men of valor. But six hundred men turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, and they stayed at the rock of Rimmon for four months. And the men of Israel turned back against the children of Benjamin, and struck them down with the edge of the sword; from *every* city, men and beasts, all who were found. They also set fire to all the cities they came to.

a. **Let us flee and draw them away from the city to the highways:** The strategy used by the tribes of Israel against Gibeah was remarkably similar to the strategy used at Ai (Joshua 8). Perhaps they got this strategy by reading the writings of Joshua and Moses; this may reflect that they returned to God's word in the course of their repentance.

b. **The LORD defeated Benjamin before Israel:** "These words briefly recall the real meaning of the awful judgment that fell upon Benjamin. It was the stroke of God." (Morgan)

c. **Six hundred men turned and fled toward the wilderness:** The two days of defeat made the tribes of Israel ruthless towards the tribe of Benjamin, and they killed thousands of men of Benjamin. As a result of the battle, there remained only a 600-man remnant from the tribe of Benjamin.

d. **The men of Israel turned back against the children of Benjamin, and struck them down with the edge of the sword; from every city, men and beasts, all who were found:** The tribe of Benjamin was undeniably guilty, but there was no need for the complete slaughter as described here. This too-severe judgment against the tribe of Benjamin would soon be regretted by Israel.

i. "Uninstructed zeal, even in the cause of righteousness, often goes beyond its proper limits."  
(Morgan)

### **Wives Provided for the Tribe of Benjamin**

**Jdg 21:1** When the Israelites had gathered at Mizpah, they had made a solemn promise to the LORD: "None of us will allow a Benjaminite to marry a daughter of ours."

Jdg 21:2 So now the people of Israel went to Bethel and sat there in the presence of God until evening. Loudly and bitterly they mourned:

Jdg 21:3 " LORD God of Israel, why has this happened? Why is the tribe of Benjamin about to disappear from Israel?"

Jdg 21:4 Early the next morning the people got up and built an altar there. They offered fellowship sacrifices and burned some sacrifices whole.

Jdg 21:5 They asked, "Is there any group out of all the tribes of Israel that did not go to the gathering in the LORD's presence at Mizpah?" (They had taken a solemn

oath that anyone who had not gone to Mizpah would be put to death.)

Jdg 21:6 The people of Israel felt sorry for their brothers the Benjaminites and said, "Today Israel has lost one of its tribes.

Jdg 21:7 What shall we do to provide wives for the men of Benjamin who are left? We have made a solemn promise to the LORD that we will not give them any of our daughters."

Jdg 21:8 When they asked if there was some group out of the tribes of Israel that had not gone to the gathering at Mizpah, they found out that no one from Jabesh in Gilead had been there;

Jdg 21:9 at the roll call of the army no one from Jabesh had responded.

Jdg 21:10 So the assembly sent twelve thousand of their bravest men with the orders, "Go and kill everyone in Jabesh, including women and children.

Jdg 21:11 Kill all the males, and also every woman who is not a virgin."

Jdg 21:12 They found four hundred young virgins among the people in Jabesh, so they brought them to the camp at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan.

Jdg 21:13 Then the whole assembly sent word to the Benjaminites who were at Rimmon Rock and offered to end the war.

Jdg 21:14 The Benjaminites came back, and the other Israelites gave them the young women from Jabesh whom they had not killed. But there were not enough of them.

Jdg 21:15 The people felt sorry for the Benjaminites because the LORD had broken the unity of the tribes of Israel.

Jdg 21:16 So the leaders of the gathering said, "There are no more women in the tribe of Benjamin. What shall we do to provide wives for the men who are left?

Jdg 21:17 Israel must not lose one of its twelve tribes. We must find a way for the tribe of Benjamin to survive,

Jdg 21:18 but we cannot allow them to marry our daughters, because we have put a curse on anyone who allows a Benjaminite to marry one of our daughters."

Jdg 21:19 Then they thought, "The yearly festival of the LORD at Shiloh is coming soon." (Shiloh is north of Bethel, south of Lebonah, and east of the road between Bethel and Shechem.)

Jdg 21:20 They told the Benjaminites, "Go and hide in the vineyards

Jdg 21:21 and watch. When the young women of Shiloh come out to dance during the festival, you come out of the vineyards. Each of you take a wife by force from among them and take her back to the territory of Benjamin with you.

Jdg 21:22 If their fathers or brothers come to you and protest, you can tell them, 'Please let us keep them, because we did not take them from you in battle to be our wives. And since you did not give them to us, you are not guilty of breaking your promise.' "

Jdg 21:23 The Benjaminites did this; each of them chose a wife from the young women who were dancing at Shiloh and carried her away. Then they went back to their own territory, rebuilt their towns, and lived there.

Jdg 21:24 At the same time the rest of the Israelites left, and every man went back to his own tribe and family and to his own property.

Jdg 21:25 There was no king in Israel at that time. Everyone did whatever they pleased.

## **Judges 21:1-25**

### **Judges 21 - Wives for the Remnant of Benjamin**



## **A. A foolish oath.**

1. (1) *At Mizpah, a curse is laid on anyone who gives their daughter as wives for the tribe of Benjamin.*

**Now the men of Israel had sworn an oath at Mizpah, saying, "None of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin as a wife."**

**a. None of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin:**

Considering their anger against Benjamin, this probably seemed like the right thing to do. But this foolish oath had unforeseen consequences. Justice not only brings punishment to evildoers, but it also guards against punishment that is too harsh.

2. (2-3) *Israel realizes that a whole tribe is in danger of extinction.*

**Then the people came to the house of God, and remained there before God till evening. They lifted up their voices and wept bitterly, and said, "O LORD God of Israel, why has this come to pass in Israel, that today there should be one tribe *missing* in Israel?"**

**a. Why has this come to pass in Israel, that today there should be one tribe missing in Israel:** They cried out to God, almost as if it was *His* responsibility that the tribe of Benjamin was on the edge of extinction. The question, "**Why has this come to pass?**" was easily answered: Because of the excessive vengeance of the tribes of Israel against the tribe of Benjamin.

**b. One tribe missing:** Down to almost only 400 men - and those men unable to marry because of the curse pronounced in Jdg 21:1 - the tribe of Benjamin was almost extinct.

## **B. Solutions to the problem of the foolish oath.**

1. (4-15) *Destroying the city of Jabesh Gilead and taking their young women.*

**So it was, on the next morning, that the people rose early and built an altar there, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. The children of Israel said, “Who *is there* among all the tribes of Israel who did not come up with the assembly to the LORD?” For they had made a great oath concerning anyone who had not come up to the LORD at Mizpah, saying, “He shall surely be put to death.” And the children of Israel grieved for Benjamin their brother, and said, “One tribe is cut off from Israel today. What shall we do for wives for those who remain, seeing we have sworn by the LORD that we will not give them our daughters as wives?” And they said, “What one *is there* from the tribes of Israel who did not come up to Mizpah to the LORD?” And, in fact, no one had come to the camp from Jabesh Gilead to the assembly. For when the people were counted, indeed, not one of the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead *was* there. So the congregation sent out there twelve thousand of their most valiant men, and commanded them, saying, “Go and strike the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead with the edge of the sword, including the women and children. And this *is* the thing that you shall do: You shall utterly destroy every male, and every woman who has known a man intimately.” So they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead four hundred young virgins who had not known a man intimately; and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan. Then the whole congregation sent *word* to the children of Benjamin who *were* at the rock of Rimmon, and announced peace to them. So Benjamin came back at that time, and they gave them the women whom they had saved alive of the women**

of Jabesh Gilead; and yet they had not found enough for them. And the people grieved for Benjamin, because the LORD had made a void in the tribes of Israel.

a. **Who is there among all the tribes of Israel who did not come up with the assembly to the LORD...**

**He shall surely be put to death:** Here again Israel did something that seemed right at the time, but was actually a horror. They decided to slaughter a whole city of Israel, a city that refused to join with Israel in the fight against Benjamin.

i. This was doing one bad thing to make up for another. Israel instead should have repented of their foolish oath made at Mizpah, and they should have agreed to give their daughters as wives to the men of the tribe of Benjamin, renouncing the foolish vow of Jdg 21:1.

b. **They found among the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead four hundred young virgins:** In the ungodly massacre at Jabesh Gilead, they killed all but 400 young virgins. Still, this was not enough: **yet they had not found enough for them.**

2. (16-24) *A scheme to give the remaining men of Benjamin an opportunity to take wives.*

**Then the elders of the congregation said, "What shall we do for wives for those who remain, since the women of Benjamin have been destroyed?" And they said, "There must be an inheritance for the survivors of Benjamin, that a tribe may not be destroyed from Israel. However, we cannot give them wives from our daughters, for the children of Israel have sworn an oath, saying, 'Cursed be the one who gives a wife to Benjamin.'" Then they said, "In fact, there is a yearly feast of the LORD in Shiloh, which is north of Bethel,**

on the east side of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and south of Lebonah.” Therefore they instructed the children of Benjamin, saying, “Go, lie in wait in the vineyards, and watch; and just when the daughters of Shiloh come out to perform their dances, then come out from the vineyards, and every man catch a wife for himself from the daughters of Shiloh; then go to the land of Benjamin. Then it shall be, when their fathers or their brothers come to us to complain, that we will say to them, ‘Be kind to them for our sakes, because we did not take a wife for any of them in the war; for *it is not as though* you have given the *women* to them at this time, making yourselves guilty of your oath.’” And the children of Benjamin did so; they took enough wives for their number from those who danced, whom they caught. Then they went and returned to their inheritance, and they rebuilt the cities and dwelt in them. So the children of Israel departed from there at that time, every man to his tribe and family; they went out from there, every man to his inheritance.

a. **Every man catch a wife for himself from the daughters of Shiloh:** They answered the problem of wives for the remaining Benjaminites by creating a little drama where the Benjaminites were allowed to “kidnap” women (who were no doubt willing), so that the marriages could be arranged without “official” approval.

i. Rather than go through this charade, they should have simply confessed their sin of making a foolish oath and done the right thing instead of trying to make two wrongs equal a right.

b. **Then they went and returned to their inheritance, and they rebuilt the cities and dwelt in**

**them:** In this, the tribe of Benjamin was sufficiently restored to provide Israel with its first king (Saul).

*3. (25) The summary observation of the times of Israel.*

**In those days *there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.***

a. **There was no king in Israel:** This kind of moral, political, social, and spiritual chaos could only happen where there was no recognized king over Israel - and where people forgot about God as their King.

b. **Everyone did what was right in his own eyes:** Generally, the 400-year period of the Judges was marked by this radical individualism. They rejected the standard of God's word and accepted the individual standard of **what was right** in their **own eyes**.

i. "It is impossible to read this appendix to the Book of Judges, and especially the closing part of it, without being impressed with how sad is the condition of any people who act without some definitely fixed principle. Passion moves to purpose only as it is governed by principle." (Morgan)